This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

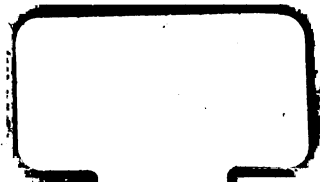
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

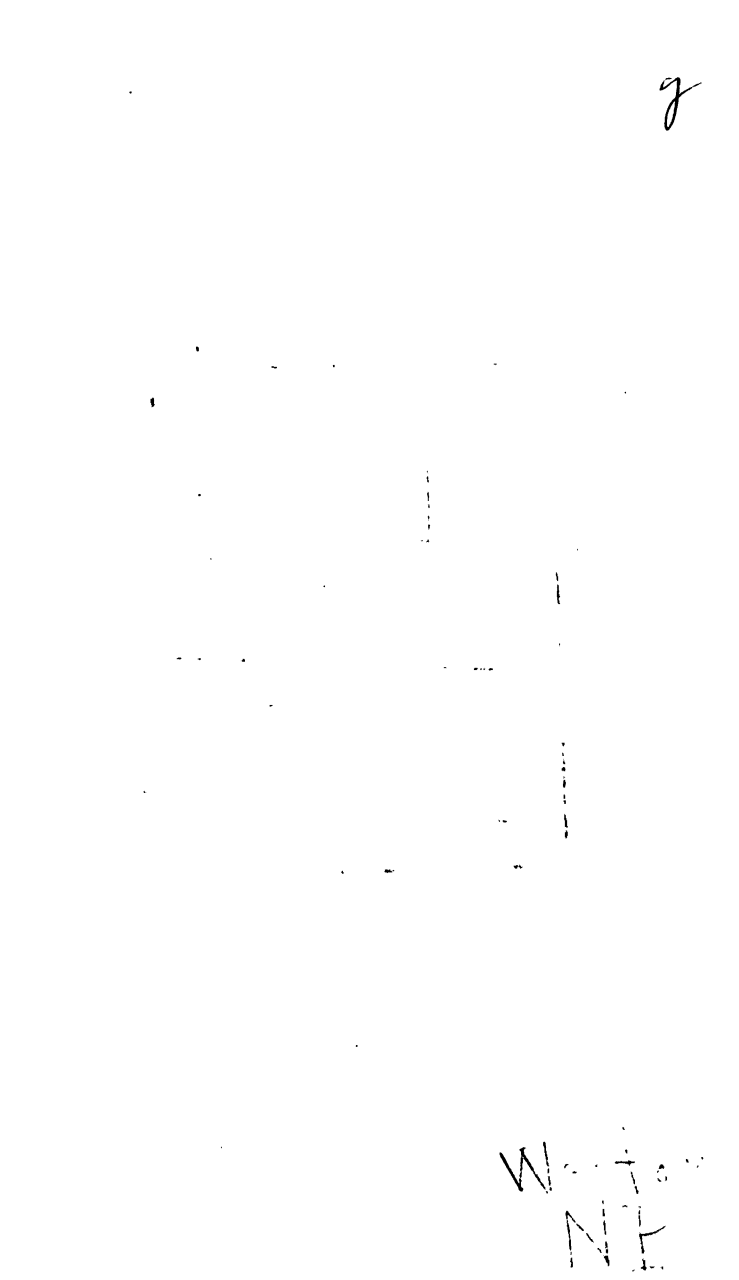
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 07607413 1





OH, MARY, BE CAREFUL!

BY

GEORGE WESTON

WITH SEVEN ILLUSTRATIONS BY R. M. CROSBY

PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
1917

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
103943A
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R 1923 L

COPYRIGHT, 1916, BY THE CURTIS PUBLISHING COMPANY
COPYRIGHT, 1917, BY J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

PUBLISHED JANUARY, 1917
REPRINTED FEBRUARY, 1917
REPRINTED MARCH, 1917

PRINTED BY J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
AT THE WASHINGTON SQUARE PRESS
PHILADELPHIA, U. S. A.

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED TO MY MOTHER
G. W.

ILLUSTRATIONS

AND THEN, SIMPLY BECAUSE HE COULDN'T HELP IT ANY LONGER, HE FOUND HIMSELF LOOKING DEEPLY INTO MARY'S EYES..... *Frontispiece*

"WHY MARY SHOULDN'T MARRY" WAS THE PROMISING TITLE, WRITTEN IN MISS MYRA'S SPIDERY HANDWRITING..... 40

"YOU DO LOOK SWEET TO-NIGHT," WHISPERED WILLIAM. "LISTEN," SAID MARY. "ISN'T THAT BEAUTIFUL?"..... 72

"OH, DEAR!" SHE THOUGHT IN SUDDEN ALARM, "WHAT'S HE DOING THAT FOR?"..... 83

"JUST LOOK AT THIS GREAT, SULKY THING HERE, HIS BOTTOM LIP STUCK OUT TILL HE NEARLY STEPS ON IT."..... 100

"MARY," HE SAID IN A LOW VOICE, "LISTEN! I WANT TO WHISPER SOMETHING."..... 137

THE JUDGE WENT TO THE SAFE AND TOOK FROM IT AN ENVELOPE ADDRESSED IN MISS MYRA'S SPIDERY HANDWRITING..... 170

JUST A MOMENT, *PLEASE!*

SUPPOSE that *you* had been in Mary Meacham's place, what (I wonder) would *you* have done!

Let us say that you are married. And suppose that just before the ring had been placed upon your finger, you had been led to a cashier's desk, and the cashier had said, "This will cost you fifty thousand dollars—cash down in advance, please!"

Would you have paid it?

Or suppose someone had come to you at the proper time, saying, "Here's a man who wants to marry you. Look at him. And here's fifty thousand dollars in cash. You can take your choice, but you can't have both!"

Which would you have taken—the money or the man?

Or let us say you aren't married. You are attractive, you are accomplished, you like the good things of life. You also know the value of money, the value of financial independence. Suppose, then, that somebody comes to you to-morrow and says: "My dear young lady, I will pay you fifty thousand dollars—here, count it out for yourself—provided you will promise me never to marry!"

Would you take the money? Wouldn't you? Are you very sure you wouldn't?

So much for the ladies.

A word, now, to the gentlemen.

Sir, suppose at your demise (which Heaven postpone as long as is humanly possible!) you leave a daughter with fifty thousand dollars, and you know she will lose every cent of it if she marries. Knowing mankind as well as you do, would you advise your daughter

to give up that fifty thousand dollars for a husband?

In this way, I have tried to give you an idea of only one of the problems which were suddenly placed before a girl I know, whose name was Mary Meacham.

And now I will tell you her story.

OH, MARY, BE CAREFUL!

CHAPTER I

MARY MEACHAM lived with her Aunt Myra in the big, white house on the top of Black Hill, where the Meachams have lived for over two hundred years.

If you are ever in our part of Eastern Connecticut, you will know the Meacham house when you see it; first, because it commands one of the most beautiful views in New England, and, second, because it has a knocker on the front door—a knocker made of brass and fashioned in the shape of an eagle.

Day and night this eagle looks down the road and over the valley. It is perpetually poised as though for flight, its claws full of arrows, its glance menacing and grim.

When I first saw it as a boy I

thought to myself: "I'll bet he's looking for Miss Myra's beau, the one that ran away and never came back."

As a matter of fact, if it hadn't been for Miss Myra's beau, this story would never have been written.

So first, I must tell you about Miss Myra's beau.

The misadventure of Miss Myra and her beau happened long before my time, but I've often heard my mother tell about it. In her youth Miss Myra was considered the most beautiful girl between Boston and Hartford. She was an orphan, rich, accomplished, had been abroad and held her head uncommonly high.

As you can easily imagine from that, her engagement to the dashing Captain Pemberton was a highly satisfactory source of conversation.

The house on Black Hill was filled with dressmakers and their assistants,

working early and late on the trousseau. The day drew near; the presents began to arrive; the church was decorated; the refreshments were ordered; and then—two days before the wedding was to take place—the dashing Captain Pemberton took it into his foolish, fickle head to run away with another lady; and Miss Myra suddenly found herself with all the elements of a wedding on her hands—with the rather important exception of a bridegroom.

As you can well believe, it was no light matter for the proud Miss Myra.

I can picture her now (and so, I think, can you) running the whole alphabet of emotion which, in a case of this kind, starts with "A" for "I-Don't-Believe-It" and ends with "Z" for "Hysterics."

Poor Miss Myra!

The dressmakers were dismissed, the trousseau was burned. "For nearly a

week," my mother told me, " you could smell cloth burning whenever you went past the house "; the presents were sent back, the decorations taken down from the church, the refreshments countermanded, and the blinds drawn down at all the windows of the big white house on the hill.

A woman of less pride would probably have sold her property and moved away.

But not Miss Myra!

She stayed in Plainfield—proud, haughty, aloof; and, as the years went by, it isn't altogether astonishing that she grew somewhat caustic in her wit, somewhat thin in her person, and most profoundly contemptuous of that sex of the human family which occasionally likes to refer to itself as the " Lords of Creation."

Indeed I think she might have been entirely consumed in her own acidity,

if she hadn't kept her mind occupied by her Scrapbooks.

I want to tell you about those Scrapbooks. They were really very rich.

One day, not long after she had burned her trousseau, Miss Myra chanced to read in a Boston paper about another case somewhat like her own.

She cut the story out and pasted it in a Scrapbook.

A few days later she read in another paper about a breach-of-promise suit.

She cut that out, too, and into her Scrapbook it went.

These two cases, side by side, gave her a remarkable idea. She subscribed to the leading papers throughout the country, and every day she scanned them through for stories of domestic difficulties; these were carefully clipped out and pasted in the Scrapbook, each with a few lines of scathing criticism written underneath.

The first book was soon filled and another started, and before many years they had filled a whole shelf in the library and had started upon the one below.

Drawing upon that caustic wit which I have already mentioned, Miss Myra had her Scrapbooks bound in sheepskin, and, in addition to the volume number, the back of each book bore this title:

"Man. His Love and His Honor. With Illustrations."

In this eccentric way Miss Myra occupied her mind, living with two maids in that big house on top of Black Hill, watching the sunset from her sitting-room window (as I have seen her, many and many a time) with an air of wistful imperiousness, and guarded always by that eagle on her door—that eagle which never seemed to take its eyes off the road below but kept itself poised as

though for flight, its claws full of arrows, its glance menacing and grim.

Thus she lived for many years, and then a Circumstance arose, so innocent in its appearance, yet so far-reaching in its influence on many a human being, both born and unborn, that I feel I ought to tell you about it before we go any farther.

Living in an obscure village of Connecticut—a place so wretched that they called it Tadpole—was a poor Meacham named Joe. Joe was a third cousin of Miss Myra's—that is to say, Miss Myra's grandfather and Joe's grandfather had been first cousins.

Joe Meacham was a shiftless sort of a happy-go-lucky—one of those men who always seem to have a patient, hard-working wife. Indeed Mrs. Meacham was the bread-winner of the family, doing odd chores wherever she

could, and yet thinking the sun never set on her lazy scamp of a husband, who was a great hand with the accordion and liked to sit in the sun and play prodigiously long pieces of dance music.

And when he was tired of playing he would tilt back in his chair, the accordion resting on his knee, a corncob pipe in the corner of his mouth, and tell what a great family the Meachams were, and how he himself ought to be in possession of the Meacham property at that very minute, if his great-grandfather—a poor, simple fool!—hadn't been cheated out of his rights. Whereupon he would fill his pipe again and play "Asleep in the Deep," with such a tremulous depth of bass that tears would come to his poor wife's eyes, and presently she would run outside and scold the hens if they hadn't laid a couple of eggs for her husband's supper.

Out of this union a baby girl was

born one winter, and, because Mrs. Meacham was weak from living too exclusively on a diet of music and tobacco smoke, she died the day after the baby was born. And, because her husband was helpless when left to himself, he was taken down with pneumonia the following month.

An old neighbor, Dame Ellison, went in to look after him, and thereby had the whole family on her hands, because she was already taking care of the baby.

The Dame told me these details herself, one day last summer, standing in the grass near her well, resting her weight on a homemade walking stick—a fine, old woman, full of years and dignity, with a face like an Indian's peering from under the arch of her sunbonnet.

"Long toward the end," said Dame Ellison, "he came to himself one morning and asked after the baby. 'Hattie,'

says he to me, 'you take my accordion to Tom Brown and he'll give you a dollar for it, if he don't give you any more. And when you get the money,' says he, 'you wash the baby and fix it up as pretty as you can, and take the train to Plainfield. You get off there and ask for Miss Meacham of Black Hill,' says he. 'It's a big, white house with a fountain in front and a brass rooster on the door, and ought to have belonged to me if my great-grandfather—the poor, simple fool!—hadn't been cheated out of his rights.

"'Anyway,' says he, 'you ask for Miss Meacham, and give her the baby, and tell her my grandfather's grandfather was the same as hers—General Meacham who fit against the British on Long Island; and tell her the baby is the last of the Meachams as far as I know, and tell her my time has come and the baby has nobody, and she can

either bring it up or put it in a home, or do whatever she thinks best.'

"Well, sir, I took the accordion, just as he said, and when Tom Brown heard what was going on he gave me two dollars for it—which is Tom Brown all over—and him not able to play a tune on a comb and paper. So I washed the baby and dressed it up as pretty as I could, using some of the things that had been laying in my trunk for over twenty years, ever since my own little girl died.

"And sure enough, when I got to Plainfield they told me how to get to Black Hill, and sure enough there was the big house just as Joe Meacham said it would be, with an iron fountain in a box hedge and a brass rooster on the front door. But me, I went around to the back, because I don't thank anybody to come around to my front door in the winter when the cracks are

stuffed with paper, and a bit of dough stuck up against the keyhole to keep the cold out."

At this, Dame Ellison gave me a sharply inquiring glance from under the flap of her sunbonnet, and I nodded in appreciation of her thoughtfulness.

"Yes, sir!" she exclaimed, nodding her head too; "and so I got to the kitchen, where I found a couple of dressed-up la-de-das peelin' 'taters—dressed in black as fine as you please, and one of 'em had a white scar 'cross her cheek. She hadn't spoke two words when I see she was French, come down from Canady like most of 'em do. I told her I wanted to see Miss Meacham, and after she had pumped me and found the well was dry, I was showed into a sitting room with that precious baby laying in my arms as good as gold.

"Pretty soon in come a grand lady with gray hair and black eyebrows, and

such a pair of eyes in her head that I, for one, would think a long time before trying to play any tricks on her. I told her my story, and she looked at the baby as if she'd never seen one before.

"'It's a fine child for its age, ma'am,' says I, 'you weigh it and see.' I held it toward her, and her arms came out for it as natural as a squirrel cracks nuts. It was a pretty baby, if ever there was one—big shiny eyes and cheeks like red apples—and when Miss Meacham looked down at it, that blessed baby smiled and closed its eyes and snuggled its little head against her bosom, and I see Miss Meacham's heart swell under her waist, the same as a robin swells its throat when it feels it's got to sing for a spell or bust.

"'Ah-ha!' says I to myself, 'that baby's going to stay here or I miss my guess.' And so it did, and a blessing, too, seeing that Joe Meacham followed

his wife the very next week, and his last words to me were, 'Hattie,' says he, 'it's a funny thing,' says he, 'but my little Mary's living right at the place where she ought to have been born,' says he, 'if my great-grandfather—the poor, simple fool!—hadn't been cheated out of his rights!'"

And so Mary Meacham went to live at the house on the hill. It didn't take many years to show that she was going to grow into a beauty; and that was the time, I believe, when Miss Myra conceived the plan which later bore such unexpected results.

However that may be, all accounts agree that Mary was brought up to have nothing except contempt for every living creature that dressed itself in trousers and talked in tenor or bass.

Roughly speaking, Miss Myra divided the gentlemen into two great

classes: the fools and the knaves. If a man didn't fit in with one of these groups, he was automatically classed with the other.

You can be sure, too, that when Mary's education had been completed by a four years' course at Miss Dana's Seminary for Young Ladies at Hartford, and she returned home to live with her aunt, it wasn't long before she was initiated into the mysteries of the Scrapbooks, which were used to point many a moral, to adorn many a tale. By that time the Scrapbooks had reached over thirty volumes, and took up a large sheepskin space on the library shelves, a warning space which always seemed to be saying: "Oh, Mary, beware of man! Oh, Mary, be careful!"

And now I have a secret to tell you, a secret so great that I must whisper it for the present, although a little later

you will hear enough about it, I can promise you! So, first looking around with the greatest caution, I am going to whisper to you that Mary didn't share Miss Myra's views at all!

Mind you, she didn't contradict her aunt—oh, no!—and she didn't argue with her—not for a moment!—and when Miss Myra started on one of her tirades against Man, Mary would listen with a bland expression which looked as much like enjoyment as anything else. But, strictly on the quiet, Mary thought the men weren't half so black as Miss Myra painted them.

In the first place, perhaps Miss Myra rather overdid her teaching; and, in the second place, perhaps Mary felt like Mrs. Bluebeard—the more she was told not to do it, the more she felt like opening the forbidden door. But I, who know her well and have thought it over,

am more inclined to the theory of Manifest Destiny.

Mary, I think, was made to love and be loved, and she couldn't help it any more than she could help the blue in her eyes or the charm of her smile.

She was just naturally the sort of a girl who needs a man in her life.

Moreover, as she grew up, she thought that here and there she could discern a masculine figure in history who wasn't quite so bad as he might have been.

There was William Tell, for instance; and Washington, and surely where were one or two, there might be others.

Yes, and whenever Mary went on errands to Plainfield she derived an indefinable sense of satisfaction at the glances of admiration which the young men cast in her direction.

And, although she appeared to be quite unconscious of those glances, she

didn't miss one of them but took them home, and thought about them, and dreamed about them, even when she was apparently listening to one of Aunt Myra's disquisitions against Man, or was helping with the Scrapbooks!

CHAPTER II

THUS Mary grew up, most delightfully in love with life and crowned with youth and beauty. She loved her Aunt Myra, and she loved that old Colonial house on Black Hill, where the Meachams had lived for more than two hundred years. She loved the fields that led to the river. She loved the library with its open fireplace and cozy chairs. Yes, all the good things of life our Mary loved, including those lace and linen mysteries which a man knows nothing about, and those silk and satin confections which are sweet to every eye. In short, she had everything she wanted —with one exception, and that exception is the one which I have just mentioned.

To use a quaint, old-fashioned word, she had no suitors.

Or, in a homelier phrase which I much prefer, she had no beau!

"Never mind, though," Mary would think. "It won't always be this way. I can wait. And I'd rather *die* than do anything to upset Aunt Myra!"

And so she reached her twenty-first year, and never had a young man call upon her, or see her home, or tell her he had dreamed about her the night before, or whisper similar nonsense in her ear. I have mentioned her twenty-first year because that was the year when Miss Myra suddenly took to her bed with the same determination which marked her every action; and, after a short illness, she called Mary one night, whispered that Judge Adams had her will, kissed her, and then closed her eyes for the last time on a world which love had made bitter, on a life that pride had made sad.

"Mary sent for me as soon as it happened," said old Dame Ellison, "and

over I went. Miss Myra lay with a smile on her face—the first I had ever seen there—and I said to myself later, when I heard about it: 'No wonder you smiled, my lady. You were thinking about your will.'"

Poor Mary! I well remember how everybody in Plainfield talked when they heard about that will. Under its provisions Mary received the house on the hill, the twelve hundred acres of land surrounding it, and the sum of fifty thousand dollars, which was invested in good farm mortgages and brought in an income of about three thousand dollars a year. These were all to go to Mary, but not till she was fifty years old and only then provided she had never married. In the meantime she was to live in the house and receive the interest of the money. But if she ever allowed herself to be led to the altar, she was straightway to lose

the money, which was to go to the Penobscot Home for Feeble-Minded Girls, and upon her death the house was to go to the same appropriate institution.

Such was Miss Myra's will.

At first I doubt if Mary thought about it a great deal. Her grief at Miss Myra's death was too deep; her loss was too recent. Gradually, though, the days became weeks, and the weeks became months. Then Mary's mind began to shift from the past to the future; but, no matter in which direction her thoughts turned, they always came sooner or later to Miss Myra's will, which stood like a spectre between herself and her dreams of life.

"If I marry," she thought, "I lose everything, and that would be awful. And, if I don't marry, I shall be a lonely old maid like dear Aunt Myra, and that would be awful too! Oh, dear!

what shall I do?" But that, alas! was the very question which Mary had to answer for herself. "If I marry," she thought, "I lose everything"—this part, you see, was very clear—"and what do I get in exchange?" Whereupon her eyes fell upon those shelves of Scrapbooks, each bound in its sheepskin and each entitled: "Man. His Love and His Honor. With Illustrations."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mary again, "what shall I do?"

She did what nearly everyone else would have done—she postponed the decision and tried to forget the question. "I'll settle down comfortably for a while," she told herself, "and read all the good books in the library."

But nearly all the good books, it seemed, had some sort of love story in them and Mary often found herself thinking: "I wonder if I shall ever have a beau like that!" or "I wonder if any

man would do that for me!" or "I wonder how a girl feels when she hears a man's voice tremble!"—disquieting speculations, these, and leading straight to Miss Myra's will. "Oh, dear!" sighed Mary, "I wonder what I shall finally do—keep the money or get a husband?" Again her eyes instinctively turned to the sheepskin volumes, and again she huriedly pushed the question behind her. "I know what I'll do," she said, "I'll study music. It'll keep me from thinking, anyhow, and perhaps I shall make a good pianist."

She started with enthusiasm, having a tuner come up from Norwich, and sending to Boston for a fresh supply of music. But somehow, every time she played a waltz she fancied herself dancing with a devoted young admirer; and whenever she played a wedding march she visualized a bride slowly sweeping up the aisle, a bride whose resemblance

to Miss Mary Meacham was quite remarkable; yes, and whenever she played a lullaby she dreamed such pure, innocent dreams that she almost fancied herself rocking a cradle with the point of her shoe instead of gently depressing a piano pedal.

No; as Mary soon found out, music didn't help her to forget. Music made her remember all the more!

"I don't want to be an old maid—I don't!" she half cried to herself one day. "What's the use of being——" She stopped at that and blushed a little, modesty checking the thought.

But Mary had eyes in her head and, although she checked her thought, she knew very well what she meant, which was substantially as follows: "What's the use of being pretty, if no one is allowed to admire you? What's the use of having nice eyes and long eyelashes and a clear complexion, if you've got to

hide your light under a bushel, and live and die a lonely old maid? I don't want to be an old maid! I don't! I don't!"

Yet, even while she was shaking her head, the counter-argument rose to her mind.

"What?" it said. "Will you throw away fifty thousand dollars and the good things it will bring you all your life? And suppose you're foolish enough to make yourself poor, what will you get for it? A Scrapbook Husband! That's what you'll get for it!"

And there she was, back at the place she was always starting from, but this time she went a little farther. "That's all right too," she thought. "All husbands aren't Scrapbook Husbands!"

"That's all right too," came the counter-argument, brisk and bright as the play of a sword. "You take a chance though. Those women in the Scrap-

books took the very same chance. And see what happened to them!"

"If there were only some way of telling in advance!" sighed poor Mary—which was as far as she got that time.

"I know what I'll do," thought Mary next morning, still undecided, "I'll straighten Aunt Myra's desk and put those receipted bills in the attic; and after that I'll use her desk instead of that little writing table up in my room. It'll keep me from thinking anyhow."

So she began cleaning out the desk in the library—one of those huge, mahogany affairs with a revolving cylinder over the writing bed, and with shelves and glass doors that reach to the ceiling.

Sorting out the contents of the bottom drawers, Mary came to a morocco-covered blank book; and the moment she opened it, I wish to say she stiffened with attention.

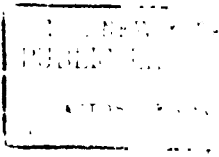
"Why Mary Shouldn't Marry," was

the promising title, written in Miss Myra's spidery handwriting; and underneath that, arranged like a subtitle, were the following words: "To be Read by Mary After My Death, Whenever She Feels That My Will Was Unkind or Unjust."

You can guess from this that it didn't take Mary long to turn to page one, and she hadn't read many lines before she saw that Miss Myra had written a summary of her most caustic thoughts regarding Man. Some day, perhaps, I may publish "Why Mary Shouldn't Marry"; first, because it was a masterpiece of its kind; and, second, because each argument was supported by incidents cited from the Scrapbooks. But, before I go any farther, I want to tell you the strange effect which that little red-covered book had upon Mary.

To write it down in a few short words: It made her mad!

"WHY MARY SHOULDN'T MARRY" WAS THE PROMISING TITLE, WRITTEN IN MISS MYRA'S SPIDERY HANDWRITING



Why did it have such a startling effect? I cannot tell you. But the more Mary read, the more she felt that Man was a much abused creature who needed someone to take his part. Yes, the more Mary read the more she felt like championing the Cause of Man, like "sticking up" for him, defending him against traducers and upholding the honor of his name untarnished against a whole world in arms! It was, I think, the first time Mary had ever been angry in her life.

She fairly glowed with the warmth of her feeling.

"I don't believe it, Aunt Myra!" she exclaimed here. And "No, Aunt Myra!" she exclaimed there, "you're quite mistaken!" Page after page she read, and every time she came to a particularly telling point she shook her head saying, "No, sir!" or "'Tisn't so!" or "No, Aunt Myra! You're

dreadfully mistaken; that's all!" Yes, some day I must certainly publish the contents of that little red book in full, but for the present I shall content myself with quoting the closing paragraphs:

"To summarize this part of my argument, Mary, no man is fit to marry you, if only for the following reasons:

"First. You'll never find a man who is pure in heart. If you doubt this, get your candidate in a room by himself and read him a beautiful poem, at the same time modestly showing an inch or two of pretty silk stocking. In the middle of the poem suddenly look at him over the top of your book, and see whether his mind is on the beautiful thoughts you are reading—or whether it's on your stocking!

"Second. You'll never find a man who isn't a natural-born tyrant. You

are expected to change your whole life for the man you marry. But try to change *his* ideas for a single day—and see what happens!

THIRD. You'll never find a man whose love is superior to his appetite. A woman will endure anything—yes, everything—for the man she loves. But all you've got to do to lose a man's affection is to give him something he doesn't like to eat.

"For these reasons alone, my dear, you should never marry. Any time you are doubtful, you have only to use the Three Tests I have mentioned. I know in advance what the result will be."

"No, sir; I don't believe it!" cried Mary, a challenging ring in her voice. "There are lots of good men in the world — men with pure hearts, who aren't natural-born tyrants at all, and would eat anything—yes, anything!—

before they'd lose their affection for a girl they really loved!"

She thought it over all that day, and all that week, a Great Idea gradually taking form in her mind.

"Yes," she thought, "I could easily prove Aunt Myra wrong by finding a nice young man and giving him the Three Tests. And then——"

She left the thought there, hanging in midair, but the next day she caught herself taking it up again: "*He* wouldn't be a Scrapbook Husband!" she thought. "No, indeed! And it isn't as if I'd have to marry him, anyhow! All I want is——"

Again she left the thought at loose ends, perhaps because she didn't know herself just what she wanted, perhaps because she didn't like to put it into words. It may be that all she wanted was to play heroine to a handsome young hero, or it may have been admira-

tion or affection that she craved. Whatever it was, it was strong enough to dominate her mind, and to set her to considering ways and means.

"I could easily meet them, if I wanted to," she thought. "I know lots of the girls at Miss Dana's Seminary who have brothers. I could invite the girls to visit me here for a week or two, and then, of course, I could visit them back—and meet their brothers."

From that, of course, it was only a step to the definite decision.

"Yes!" she suddenly cried to herself one day, "I'm going to do it too!"

She ran to her room, found her class-book, and began checking off the names and addresses of those girls who were fortunate enough to have brothers. To each of these she wrote a charming, chatty letter—though not one word did she write about brothers; you can be

sure of that. No; she simply invited them all to come and stay with her for a nice, long visit:

"It's a big house, with bedrooms everywhere; and we'll have the loveliest, rompiest time imaginable. Miss Dana's closes on the fifteenth of June, and I'll invite Miss Ames to come as a sort of chaperon, and then, of course, we can do anything we please. Now remember, I'm counting on you particularly to lead the fun; so write me at once and tell me you're coming; and oh, what a time we'll have!"

But no sooner had the letters gone to the post office than Mary's feet turned cold, her young heart failed her, and she ran to her room and had a good, long cry across the foot of the bed, as girls have gone and cried since time immemorial.

"I'm a Great, Bold Thing," she sobbed to herself. "Aunt Myra studied men all her life, and knew them better than I do. Oh-ho!" (sob) "Oh-ho!" (sob). "I know the way it'll end! I'll lose the house and lose the money and get a husband who'll abuse me, and tell his friends I'm lazy and don't know how to cook!"

At this truly sobering reflection she stopped crying and looked at herself in the mirror with a horrified expression. "Wouldn't that be awful!" she exclaimed.

Calmly, deliberately then she formed the following resolution:

"If I can find a man who loves me—and if he passes Aunt Myra's Three Tests—why then, of course—it all depends. . . . But if Aunt Myra's right, and if I can't find anybody to pass those Three Tests—why then, I'll live

and die an old maid; yes, and glory in it too!"

She looked around her pretty room and out of her window across the fields to the Quinebaug River, winding so pleasantly along between its double line of trees.

"Well, I don't care," she whispered under her breath. "He'll be worth it, if he's worth it. . . . But he'll have to be an awfully good one!"

CHAPTER III

Times change.

I know this is an ancient expression, probably as old as the second generation of the human race. I mention it, though, because it is so true. Even in my own years (and I am not so old as I shall be) I can remember when the ladies wore enormous bustles, to say nothing of those comparatively recent days when equally enormous sleeves were the rage.

Yes, the World moves; the Viewpoint changes; History reverses itself. But, in all these movements, changes and reversals, I doubt if History ever witnessed a more complete reversal than is shown in the case of Mary Meacham.

Knowing nothing of Man, she was going to champion his Cause!

Never having had a Beau, she had pledged herself to find a perfect one!

In days of old, as we all know well, the young knight girded himself in armor and went out to find a fair young lady. He roved unceasingly until he found her, and when he found her he risked everything for her love. But in the strange adventures which happened to Mary because of Miss Myra's will we see a fair young lady going forth to find a Good Young Knight, and risking everything in the quest.

Nor does the simile end there.

Even as the young knight was panoplied for battle, so was Mary, as I shall presently show you.

And even as the young knight was possessed of a sharp, keen sword, so had Mary possessed herself of the sharp, keen wit of Miss Myra.

To look at Mary Meacham, as she prepared herself for the Search, you

might have thought to yourself: "Poor girl! She hasn't a chance in the world. She'll be taken in by the first handsome scamp who happens to smile at her"—so innocent, so meek, so demure was Mary's demeanor. But Mary's looks were deceiving to this extent: she had made herself formidable by means of the Three Tests of Man, and she had vowed to herself that she wouldn't marry any candidate who couldn't pass the triple examination.

"He must be pure in heart. He must not be tyrannical. And his love must be superior to his appetite."

Such were the conditions. And when you take it into consideration (as I have already pointed out to you) that Mary was to lose fifty thousand dollars and the title to the Meacham property the day she married (which would leave her exactly nothing at all except a house to

live in), you will realize that she was sufficiently justified in being careful of her choice.

As the first step of her Search, Mary began to prepare for her party, taking old Ma'm Dubois into her confidence, and regretting it the very next minute. Ma'm Dubois had been Miss Myra's maid for nearly thirty years, and was now officiating as housekeeper. In her youth she had passed through a stormy matrimonial career—three husbands in less than ten years and the last one a disciple of Bacchus who had left a scar across poor Ma'm's cheek which she would carry to the grave.

From this you will see that Ma'm Dubois was the same one who had been in the kitchen peeling potatoes that morning twenty-one years or so before, when Mary was first carried into the house on the hill—the same one who

had tried to pump Dame Ellison " and found the well was dry."

" What! " cried Ma'm Dubois in her deep voice. " You are going out in the great world and lose your every pennee! I know it! I know it! I feel it in my bones! "

Nor could any amount of argument allay her fears; but all that week she went around shaking her head and drawing sighs so deep that I can only describe them as gusts of sorrow.

" Miss Mary," she said one morning in an ominous voice, " there is some one at the door inquiring for you, and announcing herself as a dressmaker."

" All right, Corinne," said Mary, coloring a little. " Show her in, please."

" Ma'm'selle will have her par-tee, then? "

" Yes, yes, Corinne. Show her in, please."

Ma'm Dubois tragically retreated,

walking flatfooted on her rheumatic old feet and shaking her head with an air that said: "This poor infant! How leetle she knows of the way of the world! Eh, well! If Miss Myra couldn't teach her in all her life, I cannot do it now. I have tried my best, but my tongue is like the leetle pig's tail: it goes all day and does nothing."

So in came the dressmaker, and Mary showed her the materials she had bought and the way she wanted the dresses made. In less than five minutes they were both talking excitedly together, draping the goods first on Mary and then on the dressmaker, twisting this way and that, trying to look at themselves in the mirror at impossible angles, making suggestions and counter-suggestions with a speed suggestive of woodpeckers, dipping into the style books, diving out again, mumbling to each other (with pins between their

lips), and even getting poor old Ma'm Dubois worked up—poor old Ma'm, who had come in to see what the excitement was about and was soon adding fuel to the flames; poor old Ma'm, who had experienced three husbands, all of whom had put the mustard on her nose.

They finally decided on four dresses.

The first was a stunner—blue velvet and silver lace. And so was the second—accordion-plaited white tulle with wide black velvet bands. The third was more conventional — dark green broadcloth trimmed with black braid. And the fourth was one of those blue taffetas with white polka dots, which have the strange power of making girls look like charming young matrons and matrons like charming girls.

Whereupon, for the second time in my story, the house on the hill became a cheerful scene of the immemorial art of sewing. The dressmaker went away

and returned in Bill Roode's express wagon, accompanied by a sewing machine and a pale-faced girl with round shoulders, who looked as though she didn't know beans and could do more tricks with a needle and thread than many a poet can do with a riming dictionary. She had the historic name of Annie Moran, and it was she who gave me the description of Mary's four dresses.

For nearly a month they worked—these four—cutting, snipping, basting, fitting, embroidering, letting out, taking in, building up effects and designs like the unconscious artists they were.

At times they chattered away like an operatic quartet, Ma'm Dubois' bass notes making a pleasing accompaniment to the three sopranos.

At other times, especially at the fittings, they held themselves in breathless

silence and jumped in concert if the scissors dropped.

Then the sewing machine would start whirring again, and the faster it went the louder they talked; and the louder they talked the faster went the sewing machine; until at last, the treadle suddenly stopping, they would find themselves shouting at each other against a background of silence, and then they would look at each other and laugh.

Even so, I imagine, long years ago, the craftsmen wrought the armor of a budding knight, putting in a metal insertion here, letting out a wrought-iron breastplate there, the smithy fire roaring up the chimney and the hammers cheerfully clinking on the anvils. And, while it was going on I can imagine the young knight dreaming of the Beauteous Damosel he was going to find as soon as his armor was finished—just as

Mary often dreamed of the Good Young Knight who was to be the object of her search as soon as her plans were complete.

"There," she said to herself when the four dresses were finally done and Bill Roode's express wagon had gone jogging down the hill with the sewing machine and the two dressmakers, "now I must get ready for the girls. Let me see—how many are coming?"

She went to the desk and checked off the names of the girls who had accepted her invitation. There were seven altogether.

"Seven," nodded Mary, her glance ever so far away, "and they've all got brothers, I know. . . . Yes, I'm sure Aunt Myra was mistaken—just as sure as anything. In fact I wouldn't be surprised if every single one of them passed the tests."

Thus encouraging herself, she began to prepare for the visit of the Seven Sisters.

There were rooms to be aired and dusted, furniture to be arranged, the Scrapbooks to be moved to the attic, curtains to be put up, frowning rooms to be made cheerful. In fact the old Meacham house had such a stirring up as it hadn't seen for generations; and when it was done, it fairly glowed with hospitality — brass andirons winking away on every hand, and such cheerful chintzes in the bedrooms that, the moment you stepped across a threshold, you felt you were calling on a rich old uncle who intended first to make you laugh and then to slip a handful of money in your pocket and pat you on the back and whisper: "Don't you say a word to a soul, my dear, but there's plenty more where that came from!"

And how I wish I could tell you about the arrival of the Seven Sisters, accompanied by Miss Ames, the prim old teacher of mathematics at Miss Dana's Seminary for Young Ladies! I wish I could tell you, for instance, how those Seven Sisters fell upon Mary at the Plainfield station and nearly kissed her features off, how John Kingsley and Fred Briggs took them up to Black Hill in their cars, how they squealed with pleasure at everything they saw, how they overran the old Meacham house like seven magical morning glories suddenly blooming on an antique trellis!

I wish I could tell you, too, how they chatted, sang, played, romped, and particularly how, one morning, they all braided their hair, pinned up their skirts and played Little Girls with such droll effect that prim Miss Ames laughed till she nearly died, and after a short retire-

ment came back with a killing little mustache and imperial blacked upon her classical face, and temporarily forgot all the mathematics she had ever learned.

But if I were to tell you every merry thing which happened that week it would nearly fill this book; and that wouldn't do at all, you know, because I must get me forward with my story.

One thing I must tell you, though: before the Seven Sisters went away on the last day of June Mary had promised to spend a week with each of them; and, what is more, she had written down the names, dates and places in the businesslike form of a time-table. Five of the Sisters were to be visited as soon as the summer holidays were over. The other two (whose brothers were married) were to be called upon later in the autumn.

Even so, I imagine, long years ago, a young knight made up a schedule of

the jousts and tournaments in which he hoped to win glory and the love of that Beauteous Damosel. And when he had made up his list, I can also imagine him thinking of the cuts and thrusts by which he hoped to attain his heart's desire—exactly as Mary reflected over the Three Tests by which she expected to find her Good Young Knight.

"How quiet is the house, now the young ladies have gone," said Ma'm Dubois one morning.

"Yes, Corinne. I'm afraid you'll be lonesome when I go to visit them."

"Ah, my dear, but you'll come back. You have too wise a head to be fool' by any man and lose so much. I fret no more. But did you notice how happy the young ladies were—and even the venerable Miss Ames as well?"

"I think they enjoyed themselves," laughed Mary.

"Of a course they did! And I tell

you why, Ma'm'selle: it is because they have not yet experience' real trouble. It is because no man has guided them yet to the halter."

"'Altar,' Corinne."

"It is all the same, if it please, Ma'm'selle."

"Not if you know how to choose a husband, Corinne."

"La-la, Ma'm'selle!" cried the old woman in alarm, "what are you saying? You make me fret myself again. There is no way to choose. Behol' the Scrapbooks, which it would be wise for you to bring down out of the attic and restore to their place on guard."

Mary made no reply, but to herself she was thinking: "Pure in heart. Not a tyrant. Love superior to his appetite. Oh, well, it won't be long now!"

CHAPTER IV

It was too long for Mary, though.

A few days later she found the loneliness of the house was more oppressive than ever, now that her friends had been there and gone.

"If I feel this way already," thought Mary, "How will it be in another twenty years!—another forty!"

It was in the evenings when she felt it the worst. The house seemed to grow silent and sad, as though it were brooding over the long years when Miss Myra had lived there in bitter seclusion. Or sometimes, as in all old houses, strange noises made themselves heard, especially on a cool night after a hot day when the timbers seemed to contract, and Mary would lie awake listening, wondering whether the anxious feeling at her heart was a premonition of ill.

But youth is youth, when all is said and done and I wish I could tell you how Mary felt on the morning when she started out on her wonderful adventure. If you had seen her when she reached the Plainfield Station, all ready to start upon the Great Search, you wouldn't have thought she was feeling any premonition of ill any more than you would have dreamed that she was starting upon such an extraordinary mission. She was dressed in green broadcloth—the one I have told you about—and she looked so gentle, so absolutely free from guile that, if you had seen her at the station that morning, you might very well have found yourself thinking: "I wonder if this girl knows enough to buy a ticket before she gets on the train."

And whether it was due to the excitement I cannot tell you, but I doubt if Mary had ever looked so attractive in her life as she looked that morning. Her

cheeks were like peach-blow, her eyes were almost luminous, her hair (coiled closely around her queenly little head) caught every glint of the sun which happened to come that way until it seemed to shimmer of itself. Moreover, the green broadcloth fitted the tender young curves of her figure to perfection as the calyx of a flower incloses the corolla, and that, I think also helped to attract the eye.

Not that Mary seemed to realize that anyone's eye was being attracted—oh, dear, no!

She didn't appreciate the courtly manner in which Mr. Starkweather checked her trunk, nor the gallant style in which the conductor punched her ticket, nor the watchful eyes of the Men Across the Aisle—oh, certainly not!

And when she left the train at Jewett City (assisted by the conductor and brakeman, and followed by the watch-

ful eyes aforesaid) *she* didn't know that all eyes followed her as she hurried across the station and met Edith Spencer and kissed her through her veil—no; not for a moment!

In short, it isn't at all surprising that when Edith Spencer's brother came home from the office that evening and caught his first glimpse of Mary, he straightway hurried upstairs. There he shaved, anointed himself with delicately scented waters, and changed to his newest suit. Perhaps you will think that this was a lot to do on the strength of one glance, but, for my part, I am willing to wager that Will Spencer had heard a thing or two about Mary from his sister Edith.

"She owns the loveliest house, Will," I can imagine her telling him, "full of the sweetest antiques you ever saw! She's rich too—awfully rich, I guess. They say the Meachams are the oldest

family in Connecticut, and Mary's the only one left. So she comes in for everything of course. And, oh, what a lot of land she owns down by the river! Why, you can walk around for a week and never step off it! And not only that but—oh, well, you'll see her for yourself soon enough, that's all!"

With what result you already know.

And when Will Spencer came down from his room that evening, with cheeks as smooth as silk and smelling most exquisitely of white lilac, it didn't take Mary long to make a great discovery.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" she exulted in her heart. "I do believe I've found my first real beau!"

In matters like these a girl's instinct is infallible; so now, I think I ought to describe him a little: Mary's first beau!

He was tall and thin, had a keen face, and wore his hair brushed back in the modern style of pompadours. In addi-

tion he had a trim mustache, which somehow gave him the air of a yachtsman, though I can't quite tell you how. As a matter of fact he was in the coal and wood business—assistant treasurer of the Jewett City Coal and Wood Company—which isn't a particularly romantic business. And yet, before the week was over, I am bound to confess that Will Spencer's attitude savored a great deal more of Romance than it did of Coal or of Wood.

Mary liked it too.

"He's awfully nice," she thought one morning, as she luxuriously lay awake and watched the sunbeams stealing through the window. "And isn't he strong! Why, he opened that window last night as though it were nothing, and nobody could budge it except him! And when I'm in the room he hardly looks at anybody else! And how he laughs whenever I make a joke. . . .

I'm glad he's got a sense of humor. And when I met him on the stairs last night. . . . They're awfully funny—men are. . . . Awfully interesting too. . . . I think I'd better try him on one of the Three Tests tonight, because it would be a terrible thing if I fell in love with him—and then found out he wouldn't do!"

So Mary dressed herself with particular care that evening, putting on the white tulle with the black velvet bands. She also wore white silk stockings and black suède pumps, altogether making such a pretty picture that when she went downstairs both Mrs. Spencer and Edith cried out with admiration. You can imagine from that how Master William felt when he came bouncing in at half-past five and caught the full effect of it right in the eye.

"Jingo!" he cried. "Jingo!"

And was bound, hand and foot.

They went out on the veranda after dinner. Everyone remarked how gay our Mary was, little suspecting that her vivacity was only assumed to hide a growing nervousness.

"I won't be able to do it," she thought time and again. "I'll drop the book. My voice will break ——"

But in and out of her thoughts appeared the sad, stern face of Aunt Myra, and that threatening array of sheepskin volumes. "Oh, Mary, be careful!" they seemed to be saying.

Moreover, it wasn't for nothing that Mary was a Meacham, as you will realize later. "It's better to find out now than afterward," she told herself; "though, of course, he isn't that sort of a man at all."

"I think I'll play something," she said aloud. "I'll be out again soon."

At the piano she selected the "Fifth Nocturne," its deep, stirring melody

matching well her mood. She had reached one of the most appealing passages when, exactly as she had expected, Master William came in to "turn the music." Now Mary knew the "Fifth Nocturne" by heart; so while she played they talked.

"You do look sweet to-night," whispered William.

"Listen," said Mary. "Isn't that beautiful?"

"It's the way you play it."

"No; it's the way it's written. Listen. Do you like poetry?"

"I like good poetry."

"All right. When I've finished this —I'll read you something."

She ended the "Nocturne" with a challenging chord and reached up for the "Gems of Poetry," which she had previously placed upon the piano.

"I'm going to read you a verse from Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale,'" she

said. "Poor Keats! You know, he died young, of consumption, and one night, when he knew he couldn't live much longer, he heard a nightingale——"

Young Mr. Spencer had seated himself, sympathetically nodding, and Mary took a chair on the other side of the room. As though unconsciously she crossed her knees, bringing to light a few modest inches of a white silk stocking—oh, not half so much as a man will show when he wears low shoes! And, as though to catch the light of the lamp, Mary held the book in front of her eyes in such a way that she couldn't see what Mr. Spencer was doing.

At first her voice trembled a little as she read, but it gradually settled itself into gentle music:

"Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Called him soft names in many a musèd rime
To take into the air my quiet breath;

Now more than ever seems it rich to die
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy! ——"

Without warning she very suddenly lowered the book and looked at Mr. Spencer.

And simultaneously a little ache knocked on the door of Mary's heart and pushed its way inside, for Mr. Spencer's eyes were most unmistakably upon Mary's stocking!

Unobserved, she quietly raised the book. "That might have been an accident," she thought. "I'll try again:

"Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:

Perhaps the selfsame song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;—"

Again Mary suddenly lowered the book—and found her auditor's eyes where they had been before. Another little ache knocked on her heart, and she shut the book with something like a bang.

"Did you like it?" she asked, rising, and yet not wishing to be rude.

"Yes, yes! Please read some more!"

"Which passage did you like the best?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Mr. Spencer uneasily. "What he said about the corn was pretty good, don't you think?"

"I'm going out on the veranda again," said Mary in a muffled voice. "They'll wonder where we are."

She almost ran outside; and whereas, a few minutes earlier, they had all remarked how gay our Mary was, they soon began to ask themselves what had made her so quiet.

"Wouldn't it be awful," Mary was thinking, "if Aunt Myra was right! Such a sad, beautiful poem—and poor Mr. Keats was dying when he wrote it—and, instead of being lifted up, or anything like that, all Will Spencer could do was to—was to *look*—without paying the least attention to what I was reading! Oh, well; that settles him! I'm going to the Putnam's to-morrow. I'll bet Ella Putnam's brother isn't that kind."

CHAPTER V

THE Putnams lived at New Haven, and next day Mary journeyed there in pursuit of her quest. On the train she took stock of herself.

"Somehow," she thought, "I feel a dreadful lot older. Maybe that's what makes people look old—the experiences they go through. I'll have to be careful. I suppose that's why Aunt Myra looked so pinched at times; she knew an awful lot. But, all the same, she was wrong about the men. It stands to reason that a man can be just as pure minded as a woman. I know if a man I liked was reading me a wonderful poem, I'd be listening to him with all my heart and soul. I wouldn't be—I wouldn't be—well, my mind wouldn't be wandering around like Will Spencer's mind was

wandering around. I know that much!"

At this point Mary found herself frowning—frowning so soon upon her wonderful Quest!

"This won't do," she told herself. "I must put my thoughts on something pleasanter, or Ella will think I didn't enjoy myself at the Spencers'."

Searching her mind for something more pleasant, she presently began thinking: "I wonder what Ella Putnam's brother looks like. Edith said he was professor of Persian history—so perhaps he's too old ——"

But, as Mary soon found out, Professor Putnam wasn't yet twenty-five. It being Saturday he had brought his sister Ella to the station in the family car. The moment Mary saw him she liked him. He was such an earnest, scholarly brother, with such large lenses in his spectacles and such a bashful manner with the ladies. Moreover, although

it was plain to see that he viewed life from an intellectual standpoint, he wasn't above making a classical jest now and then.

Near the station, for instance, they were held up at a corner. "That's three times running we've been stopped here," shyly remarked the professor over his shoulder. "I wish they'd make it a movable feast."

At this Mary and Ella smiled at each other, one with pride and the other with appreciation.

"I guess I'm going to have a good time here," thought Mary, settling herself more at her ease. "Even if he is a professor, he's nothing to be afraid of."

And it may have been because he was bashful, or it may have been because of his scholarly air; but, whatever it was, Mary and the professor soon became great friends. He privately told Ella that Mary was so unspoiled; and Mary

privately told Ella that her brother was so nice and classical!

From which you can see how well they were getting along.

Before the afternoon was over, the professor had confided to Mary that he was writing a "Life of Zoroaster"; and at dinner time, when Mary found the wishbone in her chicken, she nodded her queenly little head at the professor, as good as to say: "We're going to have a bit of fun with this as soon as it's dry."

The next day being Sunday, they pulled the wishbone while Ella was upstairs getting ready for church.

"You've got it!" cried Mary. "You've got it! Did you wish?"

"Yes," said the young professor, gazing quite fervently through his spectacles, "and a very nice wish too!"

After that, of course, he was soon showing her and quoting extracts from his "Life of Zoroaster."

And after that, of course, it was the most natural thing in the world for Mary to ask him if he liked poetry.

"Ye-es," he said. "Poetry is very elevating—the right kind of course."

"I'm glad you like it." Overhead faintly sounded the footsteps of Ella, who was getting ready for church. "I guess there's time," reflected Mary, "and I shall feel so much better to know Aunt Myra was wrong. The book is on my bureau. . . . And I've got my blue ones on." Aloud she said: "Did you ever read Keats' 'Ode to a Greek Urn'?"

"N—no. I don't remember it."

"Then, if you'll wait a minute, I'll get it and read it to you. Something you read a moment ago reminded me of it."

She ran upstairs and was down again with her "Gems of Poetry" in no time. And it may have been the exercise, or

it may have been the good, fresh air of New Haven, but, whatever it was, she was quite breathless when she returned and her cheeks were like that red, red rose which sweetly blooms in June.

She seated herself across the room from the professor, and as though unconsciously she crossed her knees, bringing a few shy inches of a blue silk stocking to view—not half—not half!—so much as a man will show when he wears low shoes. From this, of course, you will understand that Mary was wearing her blue taffeta—that blue taffeta with the white polka dots which has the strange power of making a girl look like a charming young matron or a matron like a charming girl.

Mary opened her "Gems of Poetry" to Keats' Ode, but when she glanced it over it seemed to have entirely too much "kiss" and "bliss" in it, entirely too

"OH, DEAR!" SHE THOUGHT IN SUDDEN ALARM, "WHAT'S HE DOING THAT FOR?"

much about "bold lovers" and "happy love."

"He's too classical for anything like that," she hurriedly thought, "even if I cared to read it to him." And, turning the page, she said aloud: "Here's Tennyson's 'Break, Break, Break.' I think I'll read that instead."

She lifted the book in front of her eyes and read till she reached the line, "And the stately ships go on," when a curious movement on her auditor's part caused her to glance over the top of her book.

"Oh, dear!" she thought in sudden alarm, "what's he doing that for?"

As a matter of fact the professor was polishing his spectacles, polishing them with nervous haste as though he were in a hurry to use them. Filled with a disquieting feeling Mary lifted the book in front of her eyes again:

"And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!"

From a guarded movement on the other side of the room she knew the professor was putting his spectacles on his nose. Sadly, mournfully, Mary continued:

"Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead——"

When she suddenly lowered the book to her lap, and caught Professor Putnam most unmistakably failing in Test Number One.

A tear of mortification arose in Mary's eye. And another little ache knocked on her heart and, pushing its way inside, woke up the other two which had already taken their quarters

there. "Isn't it awful?" she sighed to herself, closing the book. "I'm beginning to think Aunt Myra was right."

She thought it over on the way to church, she thought it over on the way back; and after dinner (pleading a headache) she went to her room to think it over again.

"Yes," she finally mourned to herself, "I'm beginning to think Aunt Myra was right. If I marry a man who *looks* when his mind ought to be full of beautiful thoughts, why, he'd look at others too—and that, of course, is the beginning of a Scrapbook Husband! No," she sadly told herself, "a man like that isn't worth fifty thousand dollars. . . . Oh, Mary, be careful! . . . I only hope Mabel Brower's brother will know enough to keep his eyes to himself."

CHAPTER VI

But the moment she saw Dick Brower poor Mary had her doubts. "I'm getting so wise," she thought to herself, "I'm beginning to feel downright wicked. But—yes—I'm sure *he'd* look!"

Perhaps this was because Dick belonged to that type of young men who are generally vaguely described as being "sporty." He was stout but active, liked to talk, used slang, wore checks, and was one of those few but fortunate men in whom nature has combined red hair and a falsetto voice. Added to this he was in the automobile business and drove one of the fastest cars in Norwich. "Give me a little speed on

the side," he liked to say, "and let me die happy!"

Mary had never seen anyone like him, and was greatly amused. There was never a dull moment when Dick was in the house. He knew all the vaudeville jokes of the day and made Mary laugh more than she had ever laughed in her life before.

The third afternon she found herself watching the clock for Dick's time to come home, and it wasn't long before Master Dick began coming home very early indeed. He took Mary out in his runabout and talked incessantly.

"You know I think a lot of you," he told her one day.

"Oh, but you mustn't! You might run into something!"

"No; on the level, little girl; you're in a class by yourself. You sit there like a little queen and never bat an eye-

lash when I hit her up to sixty miles an hour. There's something about you——"

"I guess I'll have to test him," thought Mary with a resigned nod of her head. "No use reading him poetry, he wouldn't listen . . . I know! He's awfully fond of his meals, so I'll try him on Number Three. 'No man's love is superior to his appetite.' I'll try him on that one!"

"What are you thinking about, Priscilla?" asked Dick.

"Oh, lots of funny things," laughed Mary. "Do you want to do something for me?"

"Bet your life I do! Anything from arson to bigamy!"

"Really and truly?"

"Cross my heart and hope to die!"

"Well—I suppose you'll laugh—but I want you to stop using milk or sugar or cream for the rest of this week."

"What for?" cried Dick in great surprise.

"Oh, I don't know," smiled Mary. "Say it's just to oblige me."

"Queer business, queer business," said Dick. "But just as you say, Priscilla. There's nothing I wouldn't do to oblige a little queen like you!"

"Then you promise?"

"Bet your life!"

"Cross your heart?" laughed Mary again.

"And hope to die!"

"All right," thought Mary. "We'll see. I've noticed he's terribly fond of cream, and generally has three pieces of sugar. So now if he can suddenly stop using them—well, that's one Test anyhow!"

She watched him closely at the dinner table and noticed that he hardly touched his unsweetened tea. "Going to try a

little dieting," he explained to the wondering family, but Mary thought he was rather moody about it. He talked less than usual, and made a grimace every time he lifted the cup to his lips.

At breakfast next morning he was decidedly taciturn, drinking a little coffee but leaving his cereal untouched. At dinnertime that night he seemed resigned to his fate, and next morning he was even more cheerful than usual.

"Well, got to run now," he said, jumping up at the end of one of his stories. "If it's fine this afternoon, I'll bring the touring car around and give you girls a ride. By-by, people! By-by, Priscil'!"

"There!" thought Mary, beaming with satisfaction. "I knew Aunt Myra was wrong somewhere. Just as if a man thought of nothing except his appetite! Now to-morrow I'll try him on——"

But at this point Pearl, the colored maid, came hurrying from the kitchen with a watch in her hand.

"Is Mars' Richard gone?" she said. "He done left his watch on the kitchen table."

"On the kitchen table?" asked Mrs. Brower in surprise. "Was he in there this morning?"

"Yas'm. Had his cawfee and oatmeal afore you ladies was down!"

"Did he—did he have any cream or sugar?" asked Mary in a faint voice.

"Yas, indeedy!" chuckled Pearl. "Mars' Richard suttenly made out for the cream and sugar he didn't have yisterday!"

Whereupon a fourth little ache knocked at Mary's heart and took its place with the other three which had already gained admittance.

"How well Aunt Myra knew them!" she thought as she packed her trunk next day. "They're—they're dreadful!"

For the moment she felt like little Red Riding Hood walking uncertainly along among a pack of masculine wolves — staring wolves, tyrannical wolves, wolves that looked when they shouldn't have looked, wolves that thought of nothing but their dinners.

She was almost in favor of giving it up and going back home.

"What's the use of going any farther?" she thought. "They're all the same." Then the old Meacham fighting strain asserted itself. "No, sir!" she thought, snapping down the top of her trunk, "now I've started, I'll go right through with it. Then when I get home I shan't have anything to reproach myself with. I shall be through with them, then—absolutely through with them—and good riddance to bad

rubbish, too!" Which was somewhat involved, but I think you'll gather what Mary meant.

"As long as I stay single I can laugh at them all," she thought, "and I've only got two more places to go."

CHAPTER VII

In this independent frame of mind she journeyed on to Putnam, where Elizabeth Woodward lived, Elizabeth, who had been her own particular chum at Miss Dana's Seminary for Young Ladies. It didn't take Mary long to discover that Elizabeth's brother wasn't at home and wouldn't return till Friday.

"Thank goodness, it's only Tuesday!" she thought. "For a few days now I can really enjoy myself."

Whereupon she started chatting to Elizabeth, and you may rest assured that Elizabeth started chatting back, till they sounded like a pair of saucy bluejays in a huckleberry bush. Then, according to the immemorial manner of particular friends, they tried each other's hats on, laughed immoderately over a

long series of private jokes, made a tremendous lot of sticky candy which poor Buster, the fox terrier, had to eat, nearly had convulsions when poor Buster couldn't get his jaws apart, went shopping and to the "movies," tried to teach each other how to whistle, did each other's hair "in the very latest style, my dear," made two exquisite little aprons (like lace handkerchiefs, they looked, trimmed with cherry-colored ribbons), spoke prettily but unintelligibly to each other in seminary French, and felt a warm gush of friendship in their hearts every time they smiled at each other.

But, as Friday drew near, Mary noticed that Elizabeth grew nervous.

"I hope Tom'll be in a good temper," she said. "You mustn't mind if he acts a little offhand. He generally comes home tired, you know; but of course he doesn't mean anything by it."

"For the land's sake!" breathed Mary to herself, using a good old Connecticut imprecation. "If these men aren't the limit! I'll have to keep my eye on this one. He seems to have them scared to death."

At half-past five on Friday afternoon a quick, masterful step was heard coming up the veranda steps, and a moment later the door slammed open and shut. Mary was in her room upstairs. She tiptoed to the door, turned up her eyes, and immediately became all ears to hear.

"Mmm!" she thought. "If that's his idea of being nice to his mother and sister, I'd like to know who taught him! Offhand, is he? All right! Little Mary can be offhand too!"

And so when Mary went down to dinner, it might almost be said that she went down with her nose in the air and a chip on her shoulder. Tom was in the sitting room, impatiently reading a pa-

per, frowning at it as though it irritated him, and when Elizabeth introduced Mary he sharply exclaimed: "Pleased to meet you, Miss Meacham! Pleased to meet you!" To which our Mary made no reply except a formal bow.

Throughout the dinner, too, she stood on her dignity toward the offhand Master Thomas, and presently he began to go out of his way to make her smile. Why? Probably because life often has a strange trick of taking the form of a contest. As soon as Master Thomas saw that here was a girl who didn't care a button for him or his dominating ways either, he seemed to take it as a challenge and did everything he could to make an impression on her. Wherefore he, too, was turning Mary's music before the evening was over, and the next day (which was Saturday) he followed Mary around with such devotion that it

made a decided sensation in the Woodward family.

"I'll tell you what I'll do to-day," he said on Sunday morning. "I'll get a car and take Miss Meacham down to New London and back. There'll be room for one other on the front seat." And leaning back in his chair he looked at Mary across the table with a look that said: "What do you think of that!"

The Woodward ladies, mother and daughter, opened their eyes in the roundest wonder and questioned each other mutely, thus: "What has come over our Tom?"

"I'd rather go for a walk," said Mary.

In spite of himself Master Thomas frowned a little at seeing his suggestion received so lightly; and, seeing that frown, Mary suddenly blinked her eyes, thinking: "'Every man is a tyrant at

heart!' Test Number Two! All right, I'll try him on that."

"Wouldn't you rather have the ride?" frowned Master Thomas.

"No; I'd rather have the walk."

"Very well," he said, frowning a little more; "we'll go for a walk then."

They set off at a good pace, as though it were Master Thomas' idea to tire Mary out and make her repent of her choice. Before long, however, he himself began to puff. "Let's sit down," he said.

"No; let's go on," said Mary. "I like to walk fast."

They went a little farther, and Master Thomas' frown turned to a scowl. "It would have been better—to have gone—to New London ——" he grumbled.

"No," said Mary. "This is better than that."

At this continued reversal of his

10394

judgment Master Thomas became huffy and sulked openly.

"Just because he can't have his own way," reflected Mary. "Yes, Aunt Myra's right again. 'Every man is a tyrant at heart.' Just look at this great, sulky thing here, walking along without talking to me, his bottom lip stuck out till he nearly steps on it! Well, there's only one more place to go, and won't I be glad when it's over!"

The last visit on Mary's list was with Deborah Browning, who lived in Danielson, and Mary hadn't been off the train a minute before Deborah was telling her about the picnic.

"There's a crowd of us going to Alexander Lake to-morrow," she crowed. "You're just in time!" And, being a very talkative little Deborah indeed, she continued: "The girls are just crazy to know why Harry hasn't

invited anybody yet, but of course he's going to take you. I've told him all about you, and, honestly and truly, I do believe he's fallen in love with you already. But don't you dare to tell him what I've told you, Mary Meacham!"

She promised, of course, and, while Deborah chatted away, Mary couldn't help wondering what sort of man her Last Chance would be. "Wouldn't it be strange," she thought, "if I found him at the very last place! He must be awfully popular to have the girls crazy to know who he's going to take to the picnic!" (Shades of English grammar! how Miss Dana would have shuddered at that!) "Perhaps he's one of those nice young men who play the mandolin and sing ballads like they do in the glee clubs," she thought. "I hope he's tall—and has brown eyes—

and I think he has somehow—though I'm sure I don't know why ——"

Thus Mary dreamed and imagined vain things while Deborah's tongue kept clicking away like a shuttle in a sewing machine.

But the moment Mary's eyes rested on brother Harry her heart went down to her little suède shoes, for she knew her Last Chance had failed her. "If there's one thing I hate," she thought, "it's a smirking man! I'll settle his case quick!"

Her chance came at dinnertime, when they had muskmelon for dessert. Mary always sprinkled hers with salt, a trick she had learned from Miss Myra. But when Harry Browning came to his melon he covered it with sugar, smirking across at Mary as he did so, until she almost had to grit her teeth.

"Did you ever try salt on your melon, Mr. Browning?" she suddenly

asked, seizing on Test Number Three.

"Not for me, thank you," said Harry, smirking afresh.

"That's funny; I've never tried sugar. Let's change melons, just for fun. I'll eat yours, and you eat mine." So saying, she put an extra layer of salt on hers, and passed it over to the protesting Harry.

"I can't eat it," he said.

"Try," said Mary. "Please! I'm going to eat yours."

He pecked it a little with his spoon, getting more salt than melon, but when he lifted it to his mouth he made a face like one of those old-fashioned masks which small boys used to wear to frighten their little sisters.

"I can't," he said.

"Try," Mary encouraged him, smiling sweetly across the table. "Just to oblige me!"

Accordingly he made a few more

half-hearted attempts, but anyone could see he had made up his mind not to eat it, and it wasn't long before he pushed his plate back with that gesture which says: "No more!" After that he ceased to smirk at Mary for the time being, but looked thoughtful and moody, as a young man will generally look when he feels that he has been cheated out of his favorite dessert.

"They're all alike," Mary told herself that night as she lay wide awake, staring up into the dark. "And to think — if it hadn't been for Aunt Myra's Tests, I'd have given fifty thousand dollars for one! Fifty thousand dollars for one!" she bitterly cried to herself. "Why, I wouldn't pay fifty cents a dozen! There! I suppose the only reason that girls get married is because they buy their pig in a bag—and when they wake up and see what they've

got, why then, of course, it's too late to change it!"

Her thoughts turned to the picnic which was to take place next day, and her growing scorn of man gave her a really tremendous idea.

"Up till now," she thought, "I've tested them one by one. I wonder if there isn't some way I could do it wholesale. Deborah says twelve couples are going, and most of the men are engaged too. I wonder if I could get them to sit like a class, and put a Test to the whole twelve at once. Wouldn't it be too killing for anything!"

In other words, having bowled Man over, one by one, Mary had worked herself into a state of mind where she was planning a general massacre. She lay awake for a long time, perfecting her plans, smiling to herself as she did so, much the same as Miss Myra used to

smile when pasting a clipping in the current Scrapbook.

"Yes," she thought, "and then, while all the men are sitting around, I'll read them Whitman's poem about Lincoln. And right there at the very place where the Captain lies dead upon the deck, I'll suddenly look up ——" But here a revulsion of feeling fell over her. "No, I won't!" she half sobbed. "I know they'll all be looking, and it's bad enough already."

She cried then, as girls have cried on their pillows since time immemorial; and in the morning she prepared herself to go home. "I've had picnic enough," she sighed, "I'll have to make the best excuse I can and get home quick—or I feel I'll break down——"

She looked it, too, and was so pale and subdued that chatty little Deborah was quite frightened. "Don't you

think we'd better send for a doctor, Mary?" she asked.

"No, dear. I—I know the medicine I want. I'll be all right, if I can only get home."

And so it was that Mary went home, feeling cold and trembly, and really not far from being ill. Yes, so it was that Mary went home from her Wonderful Search—that Search which was to have vindicated once and for all the Love and the Honor of Man.

CHAPTER VIII

On the train one of the men across the aisle kept ogling her.

"If he only knew how nauseated it makes me feel," thought Mary, "he wouldn't do it."

And again, when the conductor came and gallantly smiled and squared his elbows to punch her ticket, the same feeling swept over her.

"No, thank you," thought Mary, "I won't smile back. I know Mankind too well!"

She got off the train at Plainfield, the sense of disillusion still hanging heavily upon her. Instead of stepping lightly into Fred Briggs' livery car, she had to climb in as though the spring had gone out of her knees.

"I feel dead somehow," she thought, "as though I had no faith or enthusiasm

left. I ought to feel so happy at getting home again, but I don't at all! Oh, dear! I wonder if a Girl can be Too Wise for her Own Good! I wonder if there's such a thing as Knowing Too Much!"

The car labored up Black Hill until they came in sight of the old Meacham homestead, standing so nobly among its maples, guarded, as ever, by the eagle on its door—that eagle which always looks down the road and over the valley, poised as though for flight, its claws full of arrows and its glance menacing and grim.

They turned into the driveway and Mary felt like a ship-wrecked sailor who sees at last the safe and peaceful haven. "How good it all looks!" she thought. "I've a mind to call it 'Eden' —because it will be an Eden, now I've learned enough to keep the serpents out!"

From which you can form your own idea of the state of Mary's feelings as she jumped out of the car and entered the house—a house which had kept its doors closed to Man for nearly fifty years. And then, just at the very moment when Mary thought she had reached a sure refuge, just as soon as she walked in the door of her own house —what did she find?

She found the place overrun by strange men!—the hall rack covered with strange male headgear! — male voices proceeding from the bedrooms!— and last, but not least (as she found out later), a young man upstairs in one of the beds! Surely—surely—if ever a girl was justified in succumbing to a mortal shock, it was Mary.

She was staring and listening, open-mouthed and bewildered, when Ma'm Dubois came hurrying down the stairs. "Ah, ma cherie!" she cried in her deep

notes, "how glad I am to see you! I was just about to try you on a telephone."

"But, Corinne," gasped Mary, "what—what—what on earth is it all about?" And leading Ma'm Dubois out of hearing she whispered. "*What* are all these men doing here?"

"Ah, Ma'm'selle, they are here because of the fire."

"Fire?" demanded Mary, feeling as though her reason would leave her. "What—what fire?"

"The fire which is out, thanks to our noble young gallant! But come, Ma'm'selle, you shall see for yourself!" She led Mary to the back of the house and showed her a place on the roof where a great hole had been burned out among the shingles. "As Ma'm'selle knows," began M'am Dubois, while Mary started up horrified, "we have had no rain for a month and the shingle she was

dry. Perhaps a spark fell from the chimney—that I cannot tell, for I was ironing and watching the young gentlemen bug hunters in their scrutiny of the trees ——"

"Watching what, Corinne?"

"Those young men from the Government, eight in all, I think, with knapsacks on their backs like any soldier, who search the trees of all the world for the tipsy moth and the tented caterpillar. You remember they came last year and asked permission to drink the water from the well ——"

"Yes, yes!"

"So, as I say, Ma'm'selle, I was ironing the tablecloths and watching one of the young men, who had come around to the back and was making strange marks upon the maples. Suddenly he stops and holds up his nose to the wind, looking as though he smell' some mystery which he does not greatly admire.

The other young gentlemen have gone down the hill to the chestnut grove and this one is left to his solitary. He turns around with his face on high, and suddenly he comes leaping to the door at a full gallop. 'Your roof is on fire!' he holler, 'Where is a ladder! Quick!'"

"Oh!" gasped Mary.

"I take him to the stable, but the stable she is lock'. Ha! He breaks a window and tumble in. He push the ladder through and tumble out again. By then the roof she is crackling, and I think to myself, '*Hélas!* It is done!'"

"Oh, Corinne!" cried Mary; and her face turned pale.

"Heaven be thanked, you were not here, Ma'm'selle. But my young gallant he put the ladder to the roof, and up and down he run like a cat with a bucket in his hand. Up and down he run, Ma'm'selle, but it is too slow! The fire it advances and crackles like a beast

which will very soon roar! Then he dip his coat in the water, runs up again and begins to beat out the fire, tearing out the shingles with his hands and throwing them down to the grass, where I pour a leetle water on every each!"

"Oh, Corinne!"

"Yes, yes, Ma'm'selle! Thus my young gallant, he conquers the fire, his hands burn' and cut with the nails, his face scorch' and black. Carefully then he starts to come down, but when he reaches his foot for the ladder, that execrable ladder she slip' and down he come—all of a piece, Ma'm'selle, and lay on the grass—quite dead!"

"Corinne!" gasped Mary again, her face almost as white as the collar around her neck.

"I chafe his hands," continued the admirable Ma'm Dubois, chafing her own by way of illustration. "No use! I sprinkle water on his forehead. No

use! But when I try to turn him over, he swear a leetle and then I see he is coming back to the life. So down the hill I run to the chestnut grove, where I find the young gentlemen from the Government gravely making their marks upon the trees and innocent of disaster. We return in a body, losing no time, I assure Ma'm'selle; and while one of them telephones for the doctor, the others they carry him into the house —our brave young hero! There I have him took upstairs because I think to myself, 'He has damage' himself in the service of us, and the least we can do is the best. I think to myself, 'If Miss Mary were here, she would do no less. I cannot leave him out here on the grass, for all the world to see!'"

"You did perfectly right, Corinne," said Mary earnestly. "But what did the doctor say?"

"The doctor he is still upstairs, ap-

plying the bandages. Ha! Here he comes now, and I think he is looking for you."

Doctor Chase joined them, and took a long look at the hole in the roof before doing anything else.

"Well, doctor, how is he?" asked Mary, when she thought he had looked long enough.

"Oh, pretty well shaken up, Miss Meacham. He had a bad knock on the head, but I don't think there's any fracture. Two ribs broken"—Mary caught her breath at that—"hands burned, face scorched, but I think he's all right inside—except the ribs of course." Again the doctor looked up at the roof. "I suppose he can be moved to a hospital," he said, "if you don't want to be bothered with him here."

"Bothered with him, indeed!" cried Mary indignantly. "He didn't mind 'bothering' to save the house from be-

ing burned, and I guess he can stay here as long as he wants to—and no 'bother' about it either!"

The doctor's eyes twinkled, but apparently he was still examining the hole in the roof. "Must have been quite a fire," he said. "I've made him as comfortable as I can," he continued. "I'll get a nurse and be back this afternoon. If you'll come upstairs," he said to Ma'm Dubois, "I'll show you what to do till I get back."

"I'll come too," said Mary; "that is, if I can of course," she timidly added.

"Come right along," said the doctor. "Nothing to fear. I've got him bandaged till his own mother wouldn't know him."

Which wasn't exaggeration. When Mary entered the sick room all she could see was a huge cocoon on the pillow, so thoroughly had the doctor bandaged his patient's head, scarcely

leaving openings for the eyes and mouth.

"I've given him a hypodermic," said the doctor. "That'll keep him quiet for a while. When he wakes up give him a spoonful of this every half hour, and tell him not to move any more than he can help. That's all we can do for the present, boys, thank you," he said, turning to the two young men who had been helping him. "Better introduce yourselves to Miss Meacham here, and tell the others downstairs that they can go on with their bug hunting. No more excitement here to-day." Thus the doctor, brusque, efficient, inspiring confidence with every word he said.

However, in one particular he was decidedly wrong. "No more excitement here to-day," he had said. But, oh! "Suppose he'd been killed!" Mary kept thinking. "Or suppose he hadn't been here; and the house had burned

down! Imagine me coming home and having no home to come to! Oh, dear! I—I guess I mustn't be too hard on the men! I—I guess they have their uses, after all! Even if they're not worth marrying, I needn't go around thinking mean things about them."

CHAPTER IX

MARY took turns with Ma'm Dubois in watching the patient, sitting in a chair by the window and feeling as though his life depended upon her watchfulness.

About two o'clock he showed signs of restlessness, and then there was more excitement for Mary. "Are you asleep?" she whispered, tiptoeing to the bed.

The patient groaned by way of answer, and you can imagine how Mary's heart beat then.

"You're to lie perfectly quiet," she said, "and I'm to give you some medicine." She poured out a spoonful with a shaky hand. "Open your mouth, please," she said, and found her voice shaky too.

The cocoon on the pillow moved a little, and an indeterminate cavern opened among the bandages, the while two eyes were fastened on Mary's face.

"Now!" she said, and the spoonful of medicine disappeared in such a gratifying manner that Mary needed nothing except a uniform to make her a regular nurse. "I don't suppose I ought to talk to you," she said, "but you've no idea how grateful I am for the way you saved the house."

"Sorry," said the cocoon very uncertainly. "I remember—ladder slipped —make you a lot of trouble—my fault——"

"No trouble at all!" cried Mary, and nearly added "It's a pleasure," but caught herself in time. "We mustn't talk any more," she said; "you've got to rest and be quiet."

At the end of half an hour she tiptoed to the bed again. (From which

you can see that Mary wasn't going to let him die through lack of attention!)

"Are you asleep?" she whispered.

"No."

"Then open your mouth, please."

Again he took his medicine and again he looked at Mary through his bandages. "Am I hurt much?"

"Only a rib or two," said Mary, "and a few burns."

"You can't kill—good man," he began, but ended "Oh-o-oh!" which signifies a groan.

"I'm so sorry!" mourned Mary.

"It's all right. Only can't smile—hurts my face. Say!"

"Yes?" said Mary, leaning over to listen.

"You're—awful nice—nurse."

Talk about excitement for Mary!

And when the doctor returned with the regular nurse there was more and

more of it. The doctor found his patient's temperature rising, and Mary didn't like the looks of the nurse.

"That hard-faced thing!" she thought. "I know I wouldn't want her if I were sick! I'll keep my eye on her!"

More than that, Mary kept her ear on her. Toward midnight she heard the patient groaning.

"Why doesn't she do something to ease him!" thought Mary, sitting up in bed; and suddenly she sat up very erect indeed, because another significant sound was accompanying the groans. "Oh, oh!" cried Mary to herself, "I can't believe it!"

She slipped out of bed, unconsciously selected her prettiest kimono and slippers, and stole out into the hall.

"Yes!" said Mary between her teeth. "While he's groaning she's snoring!"

And in less than half a minute there

was a very wide-awake and indignant nurse in that sick room—indignant not (as you might suppose) because she had been caught asleep but because she had been accused of snoring!

"I'll send for Mrs. Ellison to-morrow," thought Mary as she slipped back into bed. "And I don't thank Doctor Chase for bringing that Great Snoring Thing, either!"

So, bright and early in the morning, Mary telephoned Fred Briggs to go to Tadpole and bring Dame Ellison; and as soon as Doctor Chase appeared Mary spoke to him very nicely—in a manner which reflected great credit upon Miss Dana's Seminary for Young Ladies. But when the doctor finally caught Mary's meaning, he understood that he was being asked to take his Snoring Nurse away to make room for home talent.

In short, moved by her solicitude for

the patient, Mary put a ladylike flea in the doctor's ear; and when the doctor saw the nurse and began: "I hear you were snoring last night ——" the nurse turned around and put a rather vulgar flea in the doctor's other ear, and left him standing there in open-mouthed astonishment.

The nurse disappeared with the arrival of Dame Ellison—she whom I interviewed last summer by the side of her well, leaning on a handmade walking-stick, her hands trembling a little on the handle of the stick, but her mind as bright as any button.

"We nursed him," she told me, "turn and turn about, me and that old Frenchwoman with the scar across her face—the one who tried to pump me that morning I carried Mary up to Miss Myra's—and we had to look after the poor lad well, 'cause one of his ribs had hurt his lights and pleurisy set in. We

got him through it, us and the doctor together; and, what with Mary's custards and one thing and another, he soon began to mend.

"It didn't take me long to see that Mary was going around with cheeks redder'n they might have been and eyes a lot brighter too. The old Frenchwoman, she see it as well as me, and shook her head till I thought it would drop off! One day in the kitchen I up and asked her why she shook her head so, and then she told me about Miss Myra's will. 'What?' says I, nearly taken off my feet, 'Mary loses all that money if she marries?'

"'Every pen-nee!' says she in her funny French way.

"'My lands!' says I, setting down quick. 'If that ain't the prettiest kettle of fish I ever heard tell of!' And then I remembered the way Miss Myra was smiling the last time I ever see her.

'No wonder you smiled, my lady,' says I, 'you were thinking about your will. Why,' says I to the old Frenchwoman, 'that girl ain't cut out to be an old maid any more'n she's cut out to be an old soldier. She'll have to marry a rich man: that's all.'"

"'Yes, yes,' says the old Frenchwoman, 'but this young man upstairs he has no money. Already he has told the doctor to keep his bill down as low as possible. He says he has nothing but what he carries and not very much of that!'"

It seems that Dame Ellison was still staring at Ma'm Dubois when Mary came running into the kitchen for a custard she had set to cool; and never in all her life had she looked happier than she looked that minute. "No, sir!" thought Dame Ellison. "I'll sit back and say nothing! I never see anything yet that could stand against nature, and

I won't mix in it either road. For all we know, this young man may be tied up somewhere else, but he certainly eats a powerful lot of custards!"

He did indeed. And a strange thing about his fondness for custard was this: He liked only those which Mary made.

Ma'm Dubois made a custard one day, but he left more than half of it. "Not like yours," he whispered to Mary, which was one of the things that made Mary color with pleasure like a young peach tree in full bloom.

Dame Ellison also tried her hand at a custard, but he hardly tasted it. "Too much nutmeg," he whispered to Mary. "Not like yours."

So, after that, Mary took sole control of the manufacture of custards on Black Hill; and from this, of course, it was only a step to the point where she fed the patient as well. In the first place he couldn't hold his own spoon

because of his bandaged hands; and in the second place Mary always looked after him while Ma'm Dubois and Dame Ellison were having their meals in the kitchen.

Perhaps you can image the scene for yourself.

There was the patient lying in bed. And there was Mary with the custard.

First she propped him up a little, but very carefully, on account of his fractured ribs; and sometimes, when she was doing this, his arm would unconsciously reach up and rest on her shoulder.

"Poor things!" Mary would think. "How helpless they'd be if it wasn't for us," and a wave of motherly tenderness would warm her heart.

Then she'd begin to feed him, and you can imagine whether he told her how good it was, and you can imagine whether they looked at each other, and

what they said, and what they didn't say, and why they sometimes smiled with their eyes, and why they sometimes looked at each other very solemnly indeed, immediately thereafter speaking in voices which were none too steady.

And, when the custard was finished, you can imagine how gently Mary unpropped him and asked him if he felt better, and you can imagine what he said and how he said it, and whether or not (as soon as she was gone) he began to look forward to the next custard!

This went on for about a fortnight, and then one noon Dame Ellison went down into the kitchen on the broad grin, and winked her eye at Ma'm Dubois. "It won't be long," she said, facetiously pointing to the ceiling with her thumb.

It pleased Ma'm Dubois to effect a density which was foreign to her nature.

"What won't be long?" she coldly inquired.

"Those two young uns," beamed the other. "He's been watching the clock since half-past ten, and the minute she went in the room their eyes glued together as if they'd never let go. It won't be long, I tell you. You mark my words!"

"What!" cried Ma'm Dubois, "you think she will throw all her money away for him?"

"She won't be the first."

"Ah, my friend, you must warn her. She will listen to you."

"Not I! If she's got spunk enough to shut her ears to the money, I'm sure she won't listen to me. Let nature alone, say I. Money ain't everything. Why, if I'd had all the money in the world fifty years ago, when I lost my little girl, I'd have given every cent of it to have her back again."

"For a leetle girl, yes. But a husband, he is different. It was a husband, for example, who left me this souvenir. And I say it is wicked—yes, wicked!—to let this poor child run in with blindfold' eyes and lose every dollar she has in the world."

"But what are you going to do?" demanded Dame Ellison. "You've lived long enough to know that it's no use talking in a case like this. Why, my folks talked me deaf, dumb and blind against marryin' Abner Ellison, but I went right on and married him just the same—a little sooner, if anything. So what are you going to do, I'd like to know?"

"What am I going to do?" repeated Ma'm Dubois. "You ask me what I am going——" Suddenly she felt silent, because a really clever plan had entered her mind at that very moment.

"Don't you fret yourself what I am going to do," she concluded with a mysterious nod of her head. "I know! I am not like the leetle pig's tail, which goes all the day and does nothing! I know what I'm going to do!"

CHAPTER X

At the end of a fortnight Mary had discovered many an interesting fact about her invalid. Bit by bit he had come out of his bandages—a terribly exciting process for Mary. "Yes; he's really handsome!" she thought with satisfaction. "I'm so glad he's not one of those pretty men!" From which you can draw your own conclusions.

For my part, I believe in the saying that Handsome is as Handsome Does, and Mary's hero certainly had a pair of honest brown eyes and a capable chin. Mary had also discovered that his name was William Morgan, that he was a graduate of Storr's Agricultural College, that he had no relations but a brother in Oregon, and that he was desperately fond of chicken stew. So

then, of course, Mary graduated from custards and took up the study of chicken stew.

She was feeding him with a spoon on the morning of the day when the bandages came off his hands (I mention this day particularly because it was one of the three most important days in Mary's life). "Do you like it?" she asked.

"Mmmmm!"

"I made it myself."

"That's what makes it so good."

Mary smiled with her lips, but her eyes looked serious. "Did—did your mother make it like this?" she asked.

"I don't know. I don't remember her at all."

"That's funny," said Mary, thoughtfully stirring the stew, "I don't remember mine." She gave him another spoonful. "Do you ever feel lonesome?"

"I used to. Especially at Christmas

and holidays, and times like that. But I'll tell you one thing—I've never felt lonesome since I've been here."

For some strange reason then they began looking at each other, intently, solemnly, as though they were saying something with their eyes, and didn't know what it was except that it was something so moving that it almost made them tremble.

"I wish I had a shave," he said.

Thus the Sublime stepping downstairs! But Mary didn't notice its descent. "You're all right the way you are," she earnestly assured him.

"If I could only brush my hair I wouldn't feel so helpless," he said. "But with my hands bandaged like this ——"

Smiling, humming a low note, Mary put down the empty dish and went to the bureau. There she found a brush and comb and returned to the bed, moved by an irresistible whim to play

Little Mother. "If you'll be good," she said, "I'll do your hair."

But first she had to prop him up a little higher, his bandaged hand resting on her shoulder for a moment in that helpless way which always touched her heart. And for the next five minutes she brushed his hair, first on one side and then on the other, while they laughed, chatted and looked at each other—both unconscious that the wonderful miracle of love was taking place.

"There," said Mary, putting her head on one side and admiring her work. "I don't think I can improve on it."

Not only that, but Ma'm Dubois was heard coming up the stairs.

"Mary," he said in a low voice—it was the first time he had ever called her Mary, and her heart played her one of the queerest tricks—"listen! I want to whisper something."

Ma'm Dubois was at the head of the

stairs, but Mary had her ear down to his mouth in less than no time.

"You're the sweetest girl in the world!" he whispered. . . .

When Ma'm Dubois came in, a moment later, Mary was clear at the other side of the room gathering the dishes together, her cheeks like geraniums, her eyes like two bouquets of dewy forget-me-nots. She picked up the dishes—Ma'm Dubois watching her with a mournful countenance; and though she walked to the door sedately enough, just before she disappeared she gave the forward Mr. Morgan such a health-giving smile that it was all he could do to keep from following the example of that historic invalid mentioned by Saint Mark, the one who picked up his bed and walked.

He restrained himself, however, but felt so full of happiness that he simply had to share it with someone, and that is

how he began his fateful conversation with Ma'm Dubois.

It didn't take him long to notice that the more gayly he chatted the more mournful she grew. The more he joked the more she sighed. "I know what's the matter with you," he said at last. "Your beau's gone off with another girl."

"La-la!" cried Ma'm Dubois in high indignation. "You t'ink I would be such a fool at my time of the life? No, no, m'sieur! Three times have I experience' matrimony, and each time has the mustard been put upon my nose."

"You didn't get hold of the right one. You should have tried a fourth."

"Poo-poo! They are all the same—except indeed that some are worse," added Ma'm Dubois thoughtfully. She took a long breath then and launched her attack. "That reminds me, m'sieur," she said, "of a matter which should be

called to your attention. We have took care of you, we have nurse' you, we have show' you every confidence. But I begin to fear it would have paid Miss Mary if her house had burn' to the ground."

"Why—what—what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say, m'sieur! You save' the house, I know. But I begin to fear you will charge Miss Mary fifty thousand dollars for doing it—and I leave it to you if that isn't too much of a bill for your service!"

"Fifty thousand dollars!" gasped Mr. Morgan, propping himself up on his elbows without any outside help. "Why, what on earth do you mean?"

Whereupon, of course, Ma'm Dubois told him about Miss Myra's will. "So you see, m'sieur," she concluded, "to save the house from burning, it was a gallant affair. But to make it cost Miss

Mary fifty thousand dollars—la-la!—you think it is a reasonable or obliging?"

"Great Scott!" groaned the young man in the bed. "Why should I make it cost her fifty thousand dollars?"

"That is for you to say, m'sieur. But for me, I have not lived so many years for nothing. And when I came in the room just now, I say to myself: 'La-la! He is taking that poor child's money, just the same as if he robbed it from her bank.'"

"Don't you worry about that," groaned the young man again. "I'm not going to steal anything—or rob anybody. Just as soon as I can get on my feet I'll clear out of here. And I guess it won't be long either."

He turned his face to the wall, every bit of happiness having suddenly left his life. Whether or not he thought of Mary, I shall leave you to guess.

One thing I will tell you though. In

the sitting room downstairs Mary was certainly thinking of him. "How funny it is," she thought to herself. "There I went all over looking for one—and when I got back he was right here in my own house, waiting for me! . . . And though I'll lose the money I'll have him—and that's better than being a lonesome old maid all my life. No, sir! He'll never be a Scrapbook Husband! No need to try the Tests on him!"

She rocked herself in her chair, and presently found herself looking at an old photograph of Miss Myra which hung by the side of the piano. The picture looked back at her with that air of ironic sadness which sometimes used to fall over Miss Myra in her gentler moods. And, as Mary rocked herself and looked at the photograph, it almost seemed to phrase certain questions and objections which were vaguely wandering around in Mary's mind—questions

so vague that at first Mary was unconscious of them; objections so wandering that in a very short time they might have been utterly lost.

"No need to try the Tests on him?" the picture seemed to say with its air of ironic sadness. "Why not?—pray tell!"

"Because he would pass them," said Mary half aloud.

"Then why not try him?" the picture seemed to say.

At this, Mary rocked herself very energetically and had no answer to make.

"Are you afraid to test him?" asked the picture.

"No; I'm not!" cried Mary.

"Then why don't you?"

Again Mary rocked herself, and again she could find no satisfactory answer to these vague questions and objections which were (although she didn't know it) the last, lingering echoes of Miss

Myra's teachings. "Of course he would pass the Tests!" she stoutly told herself.

"You're afraid to try him just the same," the picture seemed to say. "Besides, it's a reflection on him if you don't give him the Tests. You're showing you can't trust him."

"But I do trust him!" said Mary, stopping her chair, indignant with herself even for thinking such a thing.

"Then test him," came the answering thought.

Mary arose, determined to silence these cavilings once and forever. "All right!" she cried, "I will! This very day!"

It was rather slowly, though, that she went to her room and dressed herself for the afternoon; and it was almost with downright reluctance that she took those famous "Gems of Poetry" from her chiffonier.

Dame Ellison was in Tadpole that

day, having received news of a blown-in window; so Mary and Ma'm Dubois had the patient to themselves.

"His heart is as pure as mine," Mary told herself, looking out over the valley.

"Very well," said the answering thought; "then you've nothing to fear."

Nevertheless Mary's feet moved very slowly as she approached the invalid's room.

CHAPTER XI

I'LL sit with Mr. Morgan now, Corinne," Mary said in an uncertain tone as she entered the invalid's room. "You can go on with your ironing."

Ma'm Dubois arose—not displeased to get away from that morose figure on the bed—and Mary slipped into her chair. It was a pleasant wicker chair with tapestry cushions, and when Mary seated herself in it, crisp and cool in her blue taffeta, you would have to go a long way that summer day to have found a prettier picture.

"You're very quiet," said Mary, moving her chair a little in order to have an unobstructed view.

At this he turned his head and tried to smile. "How pretty she is!" he

sadly told himself. "I've got to hold myself in tight—and get away quick! That's what I've got to do!"

"Do you want anything?" asked Mary.

"No; thank you."

"You're sure you wouldn't like a custard? One of Mary Meacham's own make?"

"No, thank you," he managed to say. And to himself he added with a sinking heart: "I've got to hold myself in tight—tight—tight!"

"All right, then," said Mary. "I'm going to read you some poetry. You like poetry?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Chatterbox likes poetry. Very well, sir."

At this point Mary's own heart began to sink, and, with a troubled glance across the room, she timidly pushed out

one of her feet until perhaps half an inch of blue-silk stocking showed underneath the hem of her skirt. "Oh, don't —don't look!" was the thought of her heart. "Oh, please don't look!"

(Thus the effect of Age upon Innocence! Thus the workings of Miss Myra's Wisdom!)

Across the room the young man became dimly conscious of that narrow band of shimmering blue and fixed his glance on the wall just above Mary's head. "I mustn't—mustn't look!" he told himself. "I mustn't look!"

"Now this poem," began Mary in a trembly voice, "is entitled 'Footsteps of Angels,' and was written by Henry Longfellow Wadsworth"—from which you can see how nervous Mary was!—"I hope you'll like it," she sighed.

Slowly, hesitatingly, she raised the book in front of her eyes, and began:

When the hours of Day are numbered
And the voices of the Night
Wake the better soul, that slumbered,
To a holy, calm delight ——

"Oh, dear!" she thought, taking a full breath, "I hope he isn't looking!" But, not having the courage to glance over the top of her book, she continued:

Ere the evening lamps are lighted,
And, like phantoms grim and tall,
Shadows from the fitful firelight
Dance upon the parlor wall ——

Unable to bear the suspense any longer, she nervously lowered the book. Mr. Morgan's eyes were stolidly fixed on the wall just above her head!

A great wave of relief swept over Mary and left her warm and weak. She raised the book again:

Then the forms of the departed
Enter at the open door;
The beloved, the true-hearted,
Come to visit me once more ——

Again she suddenly lowered the book, and again she found her auditor's glance immovably fixed upon the wall just above her head.

And now I am going to tell you something strange that I can only call it inexplicable, something so queer that I would call it incredible, if I didn't know it was really so. As soon as Mary saw the second time that Will Morgan wasn't looking and apparently hadn't the least idea of looking, a great fear fell upon her and she thought: "Oh, dear! I wonder if he doesn't—care—for me—after all!"

Why was this?

I cannot tell you. Why does the Princess wear a diamond necklace when she expects to see Prince Charming? Why does the poor girl wear a pretty ribbon in her hair when that nice young groceryman comes for the order?

And if Prince Charming rides along

and never deigns to glance at the necklace—nor the one who wears it—do you suppose the Princess is overcome with pleasure?

And if the groceryman never looks at the ribbon in the poor girl's hair, but keeps his eyes fixed over her head and talks of nothing but the price of prunes, do you think the poor girl dances around the kitchen with delight as soon as he goes away?

"Oh, dear!" thought Mary, the warm wave passing away and a cold one taking its place, "I wonder if he doesn't care—for me—after all!"

Whereupon she put her foot out a little farther and continued:

He, the young and strong, who cherished
Noble longings for the strife,
By the roadside fell and perished,
Weary with the march of life! ——

Again she glanced over the top of her book, and still his eyes were fixed, trancelike, on the wall above her head. "I must hold myself in tight—tight—tight!" he was thinking.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mary, "I'm sure he doesn't care!

She was almost on the point of pushing her foot out farther yet, when that old fighting spirit of the Meachams came to her rescue. "No, sir!" she thought. "If he doesn't want to, he doesn't have to!"

In the same spirit she finished the poem, giving a challenging, defiant tone to the last verse, which it would have done you good to hear:

Oh, though oft depressed and lonely,
All my fears are laid aside,
If I but remember only
Such as these have lived and died!

She sharply verified the fact that his glance was still over her head.

"Do you like it?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered in a flat voice, "very much."

"I think Corinne is calling. I must go and see."

Instead, of course, she went straight to her own room; and, after carefully closing the door, she threw herself across the foot of the bed, her face buried in her hands, in that immemorial posture which I have already mentioned.

For a long time her shoulders shook; but, whatever she might have been doing when she started, she was laughing more than crying when she finally sat up and looked through the window at the smiling valley below.

"What a goose I am!" she thought. "I'd have cried if he looked, and here

I've been acting like this because he didn't take any notice. Anyhow I've proved Aunt Myra was wrong, and that's the main thing. I—I'm sure he likes me, or he wouldn't have whispered the way he did just before Ma'm Dubois came in the room this morning. So now I'll go on proving Aunt Myra wrong—and then, of course, if he goes on liking me ——"

Whereat Mary arose and took a handglass to the mirror to see if her face was marked with any permanent scars of grief. If anything, the few tears she had shed had simply served to freshen her beauty, as a summer shower will often brighten the view.

"I don't think I'll frighten him," she smiled at her reflection. "But how can I give him the other two tests? How can I prove he isn't a tyrant? And how can I prove that he doesn't care

what he eats? . . . I know!" she suddenly exclaimed. "Euchred custard!"

Almost before you could say "Snip!" she was back in the sick room, moving a chair here, pulling down a blind there, looking as though butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, her queenly little head held so innocently upon her shoulders that you would never have dreamed that she was playing the part of Wisdom and was about to apply the Second and Third Degrees to Man.

"You're sure you won't have any custard?" she asked, carelessly straightening the things on the bureau.

"Quite sure, thank you," said he; and to himself he thought: "I simply couldn't hold back any longer if she ever fed me again!"

"It wouldn't be any trouble, you know," said Mary.

"It's all right, thank you. I simply couldn't eat it."

"I made it myself," she coaxed.

He groaned to himself. "No, no," he said. "I—I'm full up. I haven't a bit of room, thank you."

"All right," beamed Mary, "I'll be back in a minute."

She left the room, as innocently as you please; but as soon as she reached the hall she fairly flew downstairs and into the kitchen. From the refrigerator she took a saucerful of custard and sprinkled it with pepper, vinegar and salt!

"Now," she thought, tasting it and finding it horrible, "we'll soon see if he's a tyrant, and we'll soon see if his appetite is superior to his love!"

She stopped at the hall table to put a flower in her hair, and half a minute later, still carrying that atrocious custard, she stopped at her room to put a little powder on her nose. These details attended to, she again entered the

sick room, her queenly little head set so innocently upon her shoulders that if you had seen her, you would probably have thought to yourself: "Why, what does this child know!"

Smilingly, charmingly, Mary approached the bed, carrying that horrible custard as though it were something precious.

"I've got it!" she joyfully whispered; and (never taking her eyes off him) she sat down on the side of the bed.

"But I don't want any," he said, and to himself he thought: "If I don't get away from here mighty soon, I'll never be able to get!" And descending to the vigor of unconscious slang he added: "I've got to beat it quick!"

"Shall I prop you up?" asked Mary.

"No, no! I can get up with my elbows, thank you." He did it, too, to show he meant it.

Simultaneously Mary held out to him

a spoonful of custard, leaning over breathlesly while she did so, her eyes like those dew-kissed forget-me-nots to which I have already alluded, her lips slightly parted with excitement.

It was thus, I think, that Circe exercised her wiles.

It was thus, no doubt, that Saint Anthony was tempted at Fayum.

"If she starts coaxing, I can see my finish," he thought; "and, anyhow, I'll soon be gone."

So, keeping his glance most carefully on her chin (not daring to look in her eyes), he opened his mouth and Mary popped in the custard, triumphantly crying to herself: "Hurrah! He's not a tyrant! He's passed Number Two!"

"It tastes funny," thought Mr. Morgan, "but I won't say anything to hurt her feelings. . . . How pretty her chin is . . . like white velvet underneath . . . only whiter . . . and softer . . ."

"Do you like it?" asked Mary, giving him another spoonful.

"Fine!" he said, and, finding it wasn't safe to look at her chin any longer, he raised his eyes and looked at her mouth instead.

"The prettiest mouth!" —he began; but, feeling that this was dangerous ground, he shifted his glance to her nose and dutifully swallowed a third spoonful.

"You're sure you like it?" asked Mary in rare delight.

"It—it's great!" he said.

To himself he added: "I guess she spilt the salt or something in it, but I won't say anything to hurt her feelings. . . . Her nose looks like candy. . . . I never knew noses could look like candy before. . . . "

And then, simply because he couldn't help it any longer, his glance slipped

up, and he found himself looking deeply into Mary's eyes.

"Hello!" she whispered.

He felt such an urgent temptation to let himself go, that quite involuntarily he made a face.

"Don't you like it?" asked Mary.

In ludicrous haste he opened his mouth for the last spoonful.

"There! He's passed all three Tests!" thought Mary, almost in awe as she watched him swallow it. Aloud she said: "You're a dear, good patient! And now you've had that, you can have anything you like."

The temptation came to him again.

"I could make her a living," he thought. "I could make a good living farming this place, and it ought to be farmed too. But to think she'd lose fifty thousand dollars! And an orphan too! No, sir! I'm not going to make her lose her money."

At this point he groaned aloud.

"I'm so sorry it hurts you yet," mourned Mary. "Let me help you back on your pillow."

With her instinct of mothering him she leaned over and curved her arm under his shoulders, and quite as unconsciously one of his bandaged hands slipped around her neck. As you will understand, this brought their faces close together, and suddenly Mary saw the tears come to his eyes.

"Am I hurting you?" she quickly whispered.

"N-no," he gulped. "It—it isn't that."

"What is it, then?"

"I—I can't tell you."

"Yes, do tell me," she whispered, half guessing.

And moved by a force which he could control no longer, he whispered back, almost with fear: "I love you."

Very solemnly, then, they kissed each other.

And what they might have said next I cannot say, because just at that moment they heard the doctor's car in the yard, and the spell was broken.

CHAPTER XII

"I MUST go and see Judge Adams this afternoon," thought Mary in her room a few minutes later. "Perhaps if we don't get married till after the first of January, I shall have next year's income."

As you will see from this, Mary had one of those straight-forward minds to which a kiss and a declaration of love mean as much as a written proposal of marriage.

So perhaps it was just as well that she didn't hear the conversation which was going on in the other room.

"Say, doctor," began young Mr. Morgan, "when do you think I'll be able to sit up?"

"Oh, any time now. Better stay in bed another day or two though."

"I see. . . . And say, doctor, I want

you to leave these bandages off my hands. I've got to write a letter this afternoon. . . . And say, doctor, what do I owe you?"

"Don't know," said Doctor Chase, looking at him curiously. "Haven't made my bill up yet. But look here, young man, what's all the hurry about? Aren't you comfortable here?"

"Oh, yes; very comfortable, thank you." But to himself he was thinking: "I'll send him my address, and he can mail me the bill."

He heard Mary start off toward Plainfield with the doctor.

"I'll never have another chance like this," he thought, watching them through the window. "Lucky I know my clothes are in this closet."

He slowly dressed himself, nearly falling over a time or two. "I'll soon feel better though," he kept telling himself.

But when he sat down to write his letter to Mary, he had to rest a few minutes with his eyes shut, clothed and in his right mind, but feeling that his bones had turned to water.

At last he managed to write:

Dear Mary: On thinking it over, I am going to run away. I've only just heard about your aunt's will.

If I stayed any longer I'd be asking you to throw all that money away for me; and afterward I'd never forgive myself. I'm not worth it and never shall be. The only thing I'm wealthy in is love for you.

I love you too much to ask you to make such a sacrifice for a poor dub like me. I shall never marry, but shall think and dream of you always. If you ever need a friend, let me know. Yours ever,

WILLIAM MORGAN.

P. S. I will write the doctor to send me his bill.

He started downstairs then, to telephone the livery stable. Half way down he happened to draw a full breath and the pain in his chest nearly made him shout.

"I've got to be careful," he thought, "or I'll be flopping over, and she'll came back and find me. I wonder where she went."

CHAPTER XIII

CURIOUSLY enough, Mary was thinking about him at that same moment. She had found Judge Adams in his office in the town hall engaged in a labor of love; that is to say, he was leaning over a table and making up a genealogical chart of one of our local families.

"Well, Mary," he said, straightening himself, "How's everything on Black Hill?"

"All right, thank you," answered Mary, hardly knowing how to begin.

They both sat down. The judge was smiling at her in a quizzing sort of way, as old men will sometimes smile at a girl, and that didn't help Mary any.

Moreover, like many of the old-timers in our part of New England, the judge seldom took the initiative in con-

versation when anyone called on him. He was there to listen to what they had come to say, and so fast had this habit of silent waiting grown upon him, that unconsciously he applied it to Mary too.

Many a girl, I think, would have gone away with her questions unasked; but, when Mary's uneasiness reached a certain point, the old Meacham spunk asserted itself and it came sharply to her mind that the way to begin a thing was to begin it.

"I've called to ask you something about Aunt Myra's will," she said.

"Ah-ha!" said the judge, sitting up very straight indeed.

"If I get married, of course, the Feeble-Minded Girls get everything except the house?"

"So the will provides," nodded the judge. "And ultimately they get that."

"Well," said Mary, "what I want to know is this: If I get married next

January, would I get all the income for next year? Or would I only get the January income?"

"Good for Mary!" cried the judge, his eyes dancing behind his spectacles. "So you've finally decided to get married, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"And lose that very comfortable fortune?"

"Yes, sir."

"Absolutely committed to it, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"What a girl you are!" laughed the judge, throwing back his head till Mary couldn't see much of him except his white-bearded throat. "I always thought you'd be a match for Miss Myra! It's that young man up at the house, I suppose."

"Yes, sir."

Suddenly becoming businesslike the judge went to the safe in the corner of

his room and took from it an envelope addressed in Miss Myra's spidery handwriting:

"To Mary Meacham. This letter to be given her on the day her Engagement is announced. Or as soon thereafter as possible."

Wonderingly Mary opened it, and wonderingly she read:

Dear Mary: I am sorry for you—so sorry that I shall try to help you.

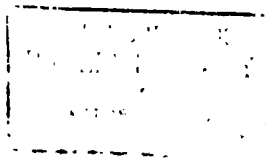
I have done all I can in my will to keep you single. At least you must love the man very much to be willing to sacrifice so much money.

But now I must tell you something.

There is no Penobscot Home for Feeble-Minded Girls. That was only a fiction to keep you from marrying.

So, as Judge Adams will tell you, you will still have everything, whether you marry or not, because you are my next of kin.

THE JUDGE WENT TO THE SAFE AND TOOK FROM IT AN ENVELOPE ADDRESSED IN MISS MYRA'S SPIDERY HANDWRITING



But, oh, Mary, be careful! You know what I went through.

Did you try the Three Tests on him? If not, do, before it's too late.

With love, although when you read this, I shall be no more.

Your affectionate

AUNT MYRA.

Mary's eyes blurred. But a few minutes later, when she seated herself in Fred Briggs' livery car, her eyes were bright enough.

"You only just caught me, Miss Meacham," piped Freddy. "Somebody up at your house wants to catch the five-fifteen. I was getting ready to start when you 'phoned."

"I wonder who it is," thought Mary; "one of the neighbors, I guess."

She didn't think anything more about it (having plenty to think about without that) till they turned in at the house on the hill.

And there, sitting on the rail of the veranda with his back toward them, Mary saw a masculine figure, evidently waiting for the car.

"I wonder who it is," she thought again.

But the moment she jumped from the car she knew very well who it was.

Without speaking, she held out her hands to help him up. And, still without speaking, she led him inside.

"Where are you going?" she asked in a low voice, which trembled a little.

"I'm running away," he answered in just the same sort of a voice.

"Running away from what?"

"From you."

"Why?"

"Because you'd lose that money if—if .... There's a letter on my pillow."

"Who told you about the money?"

"Ma'm Dubois."

"When?"

"This noon."

"Oh! And that's the only reason you're running away? Because of the money?"

"Don't, Mary! You know it is."

"All right, then!" laughed Mary, her voice shaking, but this time with a different vibration. "You read this, and I'll go up and read yours."

She ran upstairs, and when she had read his letter her eyes blurred for the second time that afternoon. She went to her room, then, and changed her dress to the white tulle with the black velvet bands, because something told Mary that one of the most memorable events in her life was about to take place, and naturally she wished to be dressed in honor of the occasion.

When she went downstairs Master William was on the veranda again, look-

ing over the valley; and behind him, looking straight at him, was that eagle on the door—that eagle with his claws full of arrows but his glance no longer menacing and grim. Indeed in the mellow light of the sunset you might easily have imagined that eagle to have been a Cupid discharging his arrows with an energy that made up for lost time.

"I'll wait for him here," thought Mary, and she seated herself in her favorite chair in the library—the chair near the western window, where Miss Myra had sat and watched the sunsets for so many lonely years.

"Dear Aunt Myra!" thought Mary. "How glad she would be if she could know that I've found a Good One after all!"

From the desk she drew the little red-covered book which had started her on her famous Search for a Good Young

Man. She began to read it, shaking her head with satisfaction when she came to the Three Tests.

As Mary read she unconsciously crossed her knees, a modest inch of stocking becoming exposed to view—oh, not half so much as a man will show when he wears low shoes! She sat facing the door and gradually—through that sixth sense which all girls have—she became aware that someone was standing in the doorway watching her.

Mary suddenly lowered the book, and there, framed in the doorway, was Master William, if you please, and he was looking . . . looking . . . looking . . . !

"Oh!" gasped Mary, putting both her feet on the floor, "I didn't know you were there!" And again she gasped "Oh!" And once more "Oh!".

"Mary!" he said, speaking her name

as though it was the most beautiful music in the world.

"Go away!" said Mary.

"Never again!" said he.

"Yes, you will!"

Instead, he advanced toward her with the air of a man who had something important to do.

"He doesn't mind me a bit," thought Mary, covering her face with her hands. "Aunt Myra was right! He's a Tyrant too!"

The Tyrant had reached her, and had gently taken her hands.

"Mary!" he whispered.

"Go away!" said Mary in a muffled manner.

He bent over her, and somehow Mary's hands slid from her face and around his neck.

"Is there any place in Plainfield where I can get a ring?" he asked at last.

"N-no, dear," said Mary. "You —you'll have to go to Norwich for that ——"

And that night, when Mary lay awake in her room too happy to go to sleep, reviewing the events of her Wonderful Day and finding pleasure in them all, her thoughts kept turning to Miss Myra and the Three Tests.

"Dear Aunt Myra!" she thought once. "I'm sorry, but . . . you see we have to take them the way we find them. . . . There's really no other way that I can see."

And again:

"Dear Aunt Myra!" she thought. "Of course some marriages are miserable, but perhaps it isn't the man's fault —always."

And the third time, she slipped out and knelt by the side of her bed, as

girls have slipped out and knelt since time immemorial:

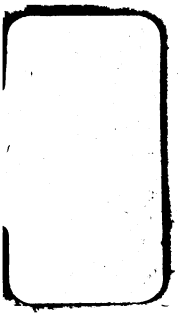
"Oh, Lord!" she prayed, "please keep him from being a Scrapbook Husband—and me from being a Scrapbook Wife! . . . Please make me good . . . and make me happy. . . . Oh, please, Lord, do! . . . Amen."

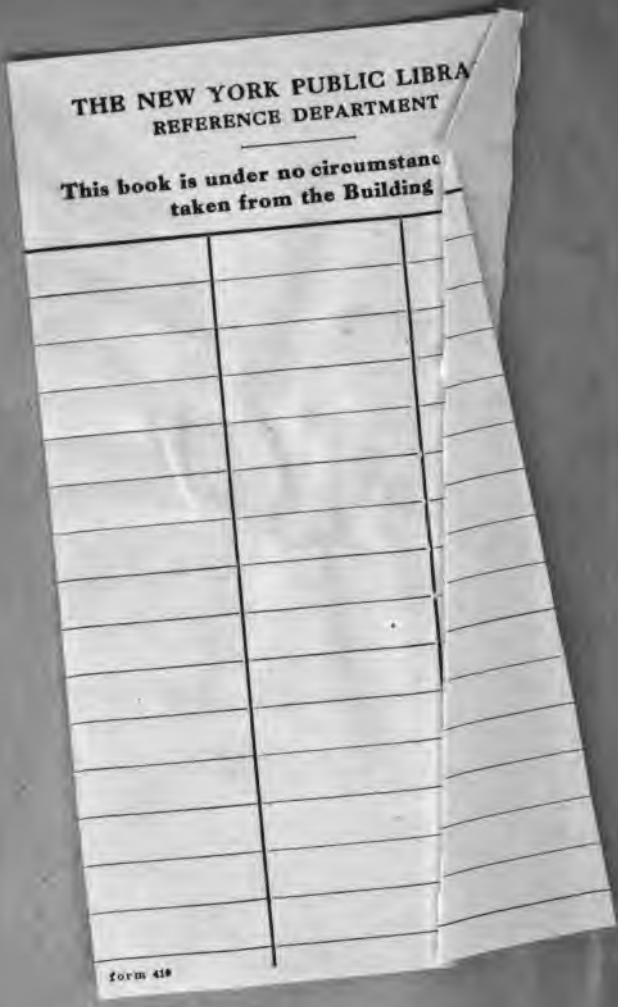
C.B.

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT

This book is under no circumstances to be taken from the Building

Form 419




THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRA
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT

This book is under no circumstanc
taken from the Building

form 418